

REJOUVENATED

MRS. JAMES C. FIFIELD



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REJUVENATED

By MRS. JAMES C. FIFIELD

Author "Hicks Jarou"

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*To the girls
who work with me
this book is lovingly dedicated.*

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CHAPTER I.

Hicks Jarou sat on one of the long benches in Central Park, reading. It was unusually warm, for the first of January, and even at this early hour there were many, beside himself, who had come out to enjoy the springlike atmosphere. He was reading a small, curiously bound book, that fitted comfortably into his overcoat pocket. It was in Sanscrit, in bold print that might have attracted the attention of the curious passerby, had not the man, himself, been so well worth looking at. He was not much above medium height, but there was something in the way he held himself that always attracted attention and singled him out from a crowd. His head was held proudly, his shoulders were broad, and well-shaped, and his back was flat and straight. He never allowed himself to sag. He would have told one who happened to be interested that the human frame would never look old if one never allowed the muscles of the abdominal region to become soft and stringy. Although his whole attention seemed to be centered on his book, he was not unaware of the slow approach of two girls. It was almost as if he had been expecting them, for a slow smile curved the corners of his sensitive mouth. He raised his eyes, casually, and glanced at them. His eyes were beautiful—dark, melancholy, with the steadfast gaze of the scientific observer. They rested, for a moment, on the smaller of the two girls, and she thrilled at their gaze—but was too much interested in telling what she was thinking about something to study the peculiar sensation his glance had given her. And it evidently meant nothing, anyhow, for again he became so interested in his book that he paid no seeming attention to his surroundings.

“Let’s sit here a minute,” said the smaller of the two girls, taking a seat on the end of the bench farthest from the stranger. Then, as her companion objected with an expressive glance at

the reader, "he'll never know we're here; he's a book hound." Again the little furtive smile twitched the lips of the stranger, but he turned a leaf of his book, displaying the queer characters, and the girl raised her eyebrows significantly and whispered "foreigner." That settled it with her companion. They would stay where they were. It was not very impolite to intrude upon a foreigner. If he didn't like it, he could move.

"What I was thinking, Doris Marie," said the taller of the two girls, "is this: Here are you and I—acting and thinking just about as usual, and yet we've both heard absolutely astonishing news within the hour. I don't really feel any different, in a way, since we saw that fortune teller, and yet I've been told that I'll be married within the year, and I'm not even engaged—nor have I a sweetie whom I'd think of marrying."

"I don't believe a darned word that woman said," replied her companion, lighting a cigarette.

"That is because what she said didn't happen to please you," giggled the first speaker. "You didn't like to hear the sad news that all the bunch would be married before you were."

"If I really believed she knew anything about it, I'd go right out, pick me a man, marry him, and show the bunch who'd be the first, instead of the last, to get married."

The other girl giggled delightedly. "I believe you would, Doris Marie," she said appreciatively; "I do believe you'd do that very thing. And heaven help the man you picked on if he didn't happen to want to marry you."

"Well," Doris Marie defended herself, "that's the way the world is going to be—matrimonially speaking—and we young people are the ones destined to start the ball rolling. The time is right at hand when the female of the species will do all the proposing. She has made selections to suit herself for lo these many years—but she has been hampered in appropriating the man of her choice by the silly custom of waiting for the man to propose. Now, I shall never do that. When I decide to marry, I'm going to marry." She shot a furtive glance at the man on

the other end of the bench as she said this. She was wondering if he was listening, and if she shocked him by her progressive views—but he read on. Evidently, there was something in the curiously printed book that amused him, however. When Doris Marie resumed her conversation, with the intention of airing many more of her opinions, he raised his eyes and studied the two girls more carefully. Flappers, both of them. They were both smoking, both wore their coats unbuttoned over very flimsy gowns, both wore overshoes over thin stockings—overshoes that were not buckled but flapped grotesquely with every motion of their slender legs, that were practically exposed to the elements for a distance of at least four inches above their knees. Why the overshoes?

Doris Marie Palmer—the stranger could have spoken her name without an introduction—was a very beautiful girl with bright brown eyes, and glossy brown hair—both hair and eyes so dark that they usually passed for black. She was the most popular girl of the season. She had quick, nervous motions, like an inquisitive bird that was also wary—and a decisive manner that emphasized the good opinion she held of her own views on any topic that might be uppermost. She was a natural leader, accustomed to having her own way, and so deftly did she manage it that no one seemed to object very strenuously.

Joe-Anne Burnham—the stranger could also have called her by name—was not beautiful, like Doris Marie, nor was she usually singled out from a crowd as worthy of special study. She and Doris Marie were always together, and while she was well aware that her companion received all the attention, that fact never gave her a moment's anxiety. In fact, nothing gave her much anxiety. She was of a very placid nature, easy to live with, always happy, and, which is more important, always interested. Always interesting too, if one took the trouble to find out about that. Joe-Anne had auburn hair and dark grey eyes, with a nose a little too retrousse, and her rather wide

mouth turned up at the corners when she laughed—which was most of the time—in an absolutely fascinating manner.

Those who knew her were apt to jeer at Joe-Anne's notions. They didn't accept all she said as implicitly as they did the pronouncements of Doris Marie—and yet, when bored, they always looked to Joe-Anne to relieve the situation. For instance—her name: she had been christened Joan—but an interview with a numerologist had convinced her that the name was not lucky for her, because in some mysterious way it did not agree with the date of her birth—but by changing it to Joe-Anne all the ill luck was circumvented. And she had changed it—not only when signing it to her letters, but so effectively that she, as well as her friends, now thought of her as Joe-Anne Burnham—and even her parents were sometimes surprised to find themselves spelling her name in that outlandish way when writing about her to interested relatives. So, as will be seen, while Joe-Anne did not seem to be a very important member of “the bunch”, she did have influence. As a matter of fact, she had more influence than Doris Marie—but no one guessed that. Doris Marie was unanimously voted the leader of “the bunch.”

The girls had said nearly all they wanted to say about fortunes that had been accorded them by the celebrated palmist they had visited that morning, and were about to go on their way when the stranger accosted them.

“I beg your pardon,” he said courteously, “but that palmist could not have known her business very well. I shouldn't take her prophecies too literally, if I were you.”

“I don't,” replied Doris Marie, shortly, and rose as if to leave at once. She wore her haughtiest air. She did not like being accosted by strangers, no matter how much she might have invited it, by furtive glances into melancholy and very fascinating dark eyes. Besides the man was too old, in her opinion, to be interesting. He had white hair—but his face did not look as old as his hair. He might have been shell-shocked in the late war—but he didn't particularly interest her, except

when she looked into his eyes—and then she was thrilled—thrilled uncomfortably, and she didn't much like being aroused emotionally. It was time for her to assume her haughtiest air.

But Joe-Anne didn't feel that way about it at all. Her attention had been aroused, and she scented an opportunity to get hold of something interesting—out of the ordinary, of course—that was what made anything interesting to her.

"But you can't know all the palmist said," she reminded the stranger, "because we've only mentioned a few things—for you to overhear—"

"She told you that you would be married within the year," he said, "but I tell you that it will not be for at least two years; and the man you will marry will have paid attention to this other young lady before he proposes to you."

"Oh, without doubt," replied Joe-Anne with a cheerful grin that curled her mouth delightfully. "They all do that. But tell me, shall I have to do the proposing?"

"No; you would never do that. He will propose, the marriage will take place quite suddenly and surprise all your friends, even yourself, and like the heroine in the story books, you will both be very happy. You will not be immensely rich, but you will have a comfortable home, and three charming children, and you will have a very good influence in the neighborhood where you live."

"Perfectly lovely," crowed Joe-Anne. "I'm glad I am going to be married and have children—and very glad I don't have to propose. Shall I have to do anything special to catch the man?"

"Not a thing. Just go your own way. He'll be in love with you months before he realizes it himself—and you'll never guess it until a few days before you are married."

Doris Marie listened scornfully. "You actually believe that stuff," she said, almost contemptuously.

"You don't believe it, Miss Palmer," replied the stranger, "but you are much more interested than you like to admit."

"You called me by name—how did you know—have I ever met you before?"

"No. I have seen you, however, and I asked your name. You have an arresting personality." He could not have said anything that would have so quickly intrigued Doris Marie—and doubtless he knew that. "The palmist did not know how to read your hand," he continued, "because the lines she saw were so unusual."

"Is she going to marry?" asked Joe-Anne, "and will she do the proposing, and will she be the last of the bunch to get settled?"

"I can see her betrothed to a man old enough to be her father," replied the stranger, deliberately and distinctly, as he studied the effect of his statement on Doris Marie. The girl prided herself on her ability to—as she would have expressed it—take a jolt without the quiver of an eyelash. She did so now. "Ooo—eee" squealed Joe-Anne in an ecstasy of delight—"a man old enough to be your father, Doris Marie—old enough to be your father—"

"Don't you believe it," interrupted Doris Marie with decision; then to the stranger, "why do you pick on me? Why not make up something pleasant—like a sugar coated pill."

"I am not romancing," replied the stranger, gravely, "I can see you betrothed to a man old enough to be your father—and you do it deliberately. There seems to be more than a little romance connected with the transaction—"

"Oh, romance!" interrupted Doris Marie; "that makes it more palatable. Is he a prince—or something?"

"I—hardly think so—yet he seems to supply the romance."

"Frightfully rich, then?"

"I shouldn't say fabulously rich—but he seems to have enough—"

"I might marry an old man for his money—if he had enough—but he'd have to be frightfully rich. Oh, perhaps he is

noted—has he done anything very wonderful—is all the world talking about him?”

“He merits that sort of notoriety, I think,” replied the stranger earnestly, “but I can’t see that he gets it. And I’m not sure that you marry him—although I can see you making preparations for the wedding.”

“When will all this happen—”

“I don’t know, exactly ; some time within five years I should say.”

“Have I seen the gentleman?”

“Ye-es, I think you have—but you’ve never been particularly interested in him.”

“I imagine you’re right about that,” was Doris Marie’s caustic reply. “A man old enough to be my father ! He couldn’t be interesting.”

“You think you do not believe a word I say,” replied the stranger, and the smile that accompanied these words was wonderfully beautiful. It made both girls study him more carefully than they had during the few minutes in which he had been interesting them in themselves and their future. “But I’ll tell you what you are going to do about it. You are going to make life interesting—and hectic—for more than one young man of your acquaintance during the next few months—”

“She always does that,” interrupted Joe-Anne, with her infectious giggle ; “probably you guessed it.”

“No, I didn’t *guess* it ; I *know* what she will do. She is going to engage herself to a young man—and soon—in order to prove that I’m quite wrong about the man old enough to be her father. In fact, she’ll engage herself to more than one young man.”

“Why don’t I marry him?” inquired Doris Marie lazily ; “does he back out?”

“Sometimes ; sometimes there is parental interference—but mostly the engagements are broken because you get tired of the young man. You are very critical of the young man of the period.”

"Who wouldn't be?" retorted Doris Marie—and Joe-Anne nodded her assent. "Oodles of young men think of marriage simply as a road to wealth—"

"Haven't you?" asked the stranger politely.

"It's different with a girl. We are not supposed to support the family—provide the home—all that sort of thing—but the young man of today seems to think he can't marry unless he can find a wife to support him; and he's not a bit ashamed to admit it. I've heard young men say that they wouldn't care how old a woman was—or how she looked—if she had money enough to keep the home fires burning, and to give them all they wanted to spend."

"Girls have talked like that for years," the stranger responded, "and boys have overheard them. And girls have demanded so much more than boys could afford—I think when you consider the question honestly that you'll admit that girls have quite as much against them in this matter of marriage as boys."

"The majority of girls, perhaps," said Joe-Anne; "not all girls."

"No," replied the stranger; "you are not like that, and you'll find a real man—one who can take care of you, and who will wish to be the head of his house, and who will enjoy his position as such. You will look up to him—and you'll be happy."

"And Doris Marie will have the first chance at him—I remember you intimated that—and she won't realize what a prize she is passing up—oh, boy! I can't quite believe that."

"All the same, I'm right about it."

"Who are you?" asked Doris Marie, as if she had just thought to inquire.

"Meaning you'd like my address?" asked the stranger, with his wonderful smile.

"Why not? I may decide to write. I might suggest a ride. If I've got to get interested in a man old enough to be my

father, why not you? You have beautiful hands and feet," she added, coolly. "Why not you?"

"Why not, indeed!" and the stranger laughed aloud. "It never occurred to me that you'd suggest a date with me—or that you'd think me old enough to be your father—"

"Your hair is white. Dad's isn't."

"My white hair is my only sign of age—and I could have it colored. Think of me with dyed hair—or a wig—walking—no, I'd go with you to a dance—think of me as dancing—I'm sure the man to whom you are to engage yourself will dance with you; and about that time he will be hating me beyond telling."

"Why? Will you be there? Will he be jealous? Why don't you tell me your name?"

"I will, but you'll be none the wiser. My name is Hicks Jarou."

"Hicks Jarou. It is an odd name. I shall not forget it. Where do you live?"

"Nowhere—and everywhere,"

"Oh, travelling man!"

"No; you'll have to guess again," and again the man's laugh rang out—a hearty laugh, good to hear. "I'll tell you; I'm a scientist—"

"Astrologer—something like that?" asked Joe-Anne, eagerly.

"No, little dabbler in the occult—although I already know more about such things than you could ever guess at. I'm a biologist—and I have an appointment—and I should say, without looking at my watch—that it is nearly twelve o'clock—"

Doris Marie glanced at her wrist watch. "It is," she exclaimed; "we must hurry, Joe-Anne. Much obliged for the spooky stuff," she added, as the two girls hurried away. "It is all rot, you know, but one does seem to eat it up, just the same."

The girls smiled and nodded, waved their hands in a comradely farewell, and went back along the path that had brought them to one of the strangest of meetings—had they only been

able to guess it. Hicks Jarou watched them out of sight—the little smile still playing about his mouth. He saw them stop for a moment, as if to speak to an old man who had shuffled along the path toward them—then hastily turned aside as if he didn't care to be observed, and found a seat behind a clump of shrubbery.

"Wasn't that Mr. Boyd Hunter?" asked Joe-Anne, in a hushed tone of voice—as if she had been a little shocked at his appearance.

"Yes," replied Doris Marie. "He is supposed to be frightfully rich, and a miser. Dad is his attorney, and I shiver when I go into dad's office and find him there. There's something so repulsive about him—"

"Not exactly repulsive," interrupted Joe-Anne; "but lonely, I think. My dad says he is the loneliest man he knows. You know his wife ran away and left him in that big house—"

"Who could blame her?" asked Doris Marie. "Just look at him. Could you live with a man who looked like that? I see him every Sunday in church; he is one of the deacons—and everyone says what a good man he is—but he makes me want to swear."

The girls passed on, and Hicks Jarou closed the book and put it into his pocket. Then he arose, very deliberately and followed them—walking softly, and with a peculiar gait—like a man who wished to get over the ground quickly without making a sound. He turned off the beaten path, after going a few steps, and turned up the hill reaching a point above the bench which Boyd Hunter seemed to have chosen. From this point, Hicks Jarou could watch Boyd Hunter without attracting attention from anyone.

"January first, 1923," said Joe-Anne to Doris Marie, as they turned into the street that ran along one side of the park. "I'm

going to write that down—the day we had our fortunes told, and heard many and various things.”

“Do you really believe any of it?” asked Doris Marie, curiously.

“I’m quite sure some of it is true,” replied Joe-Anne, “but the trouble is, one never knows which part is true and which is make-believe. So I settle matters by believing just what I want to believe.”

“Hicks Jarou! What an odd name. Do you know, Joe-Anne, I believe I could fall in love with that man.”

“So could I—almost,” replied Joe-Anne; “he is absolutely the handsomest man I’ve ever seen. Say! Let’s go back, and follow him and find out where he’s staying—”

“Joe-Anne Burnham! Of all the crazy ideas—and especially from you—why, I do actually believe he hypnotized you.”

“Perhaps he did,” replied Joe-Anne cheerfully. “When he looked into my eyes—which he didn’t do very often, thank goodness—but when he did I sure felt as if something were happening to me.”

“Did you feel that? So did I. Joe-Anne, listen! Do you suppose we’ve been hypnotized? Did some man with very dark eyes tell us we were going to be married, or didn’t he?”

“I certainly think I heard him say you were soon to be engaged to a man old enough to be your father,” replied Joe-Anne, and went off into a peal of laughter against which she had been struggling for quite some time. “Oh, Doris Marie, let’s find a seat—quick—or I’ll fall down. I’m weak with laughter.”

Doris Marie did not hear her. She was looking back into the park. “Look,” she said, “on the hill, just beyond and above that clump of shrubs—do you see anyone?”

“Seems to be a man; why?”

“Looks to me like our friend—”

“Meaning Hicks Jarou?”

“Yes.”

"Couldn't be. He couldn't get away over there as soon as that. Besides, why should he be standing there—so still—"

"He is spying on us," interrupted Joe-Anne, shivering delightfully.

"With his back toward us?" scoffed Doris Marie.

"He turned when he saw you looking. If we walk on, very slowly, we'll find him following us—you'll see. It was what you said about marrying him. That excited him. That was dangerous, Doris Marie, for he already knew your name."

"That whole thing was dangerous, if you ask me. One would think we had never been warned against talking with strange gentlemen—especially those who hang about the park."

"It came about so naturally. Wonder how he spells his name? I don't want to forget it. Next time I meet some occult party I'm going to ask if he knows a very pretty man named Hicks Jarou—and if what he told two girls in the park is likely to come true."

The girls walked on slowly, looking back frequently. The strange gentleman was not following them, although they almost hoped he would. Had they gone back, as Joe-Anne suggested, they would have seen him creeping cautiously nearer and nearer to the bent form on the bench below him. And had they seen that, they might have put two and two together, a year or more later, and then this story would not have been written.

CHAPTER II.

January first, 1923—a date to be remembered by the reader of this story—and not entirely because it happens to be the date of our introduction to Doris Marie Palmer and Joe-Anne Burnham—two of the most up-to-date flappers of the period and both well worth knowing for that reason. January first, 1923, in Central Park, New York City, where a meeting has just taken place between these two girls and one of the most learned scientists the world has ever produced, yet who is known to comparatively few. It is characteristic of the time that these two girls left the scientist without a thought beyond themselves and what he had told them of their prospects, and whether he was likely to follow them because they had tried to flirt with him. They talked of Hicks Jarou very much as they would have talked of any other man whom they had just met—could they, or could they not, fall in love with him?

“I believe I could,” Doris Marie had admitted; “although I really do not believe in love,” and then had added “did you notice his hands and feet—as small and well-shaped as a woman’s—absolutely beautiful? I simply adored his hands and feet.”

“I’m thinking about his eyes,” said Joe-Anne—“wonderful, soulful, absolutely thrilling.”

“You said, yourself, that they made you uncomfortable—just as they did me—as if we’d been hypnotized.”

“That’s why I found them so very interesting. I’d like to know more about that man. I might worship him, but I’d never dare fall in love with him.”

“Why not? He’s just a man. He was spoofing us, trying to get acquainted—prolonging the conversation by getting us interested in having our fortune told—trying out a new way to flirt.”

"No, Doris Marie, you're wrong about that. He really didn't care anything about us—he was just filling in time." Which was much nearer the truth than Joe-Anne realized.

"You're determined to weave him into a story," replied Doris Marie with an indulgent smile, and I shall hardly realize that I've helped live your story, when you tell of our adventure to the bunch. How you will embroider the facts! You'll make them believe that we really have been hypnotized—that we only dreamed we talked with a very beautiful man having hands and feet much too small for his body, and wonderful eyes that sent thrills down the spine whenever he looked at us. Trouble with you, Joe-Anne, is that you read too many stories about Indian fakirs; you take such stuff too literally."

"No, really Doris Marie," Joe-Anne's mouth curled into its most infectious grin; "you don't understand. There's method in my madness. I suppose I don't really believe much more than you do—but I like to read and think about something so absolutely different from anything we know. It keeps me interested—out of the rut—and in a way it broadens my mind. Oh, you may laugh—but I know it does. I prove it every day, but the rest of you never guess it."

"How do you prove it?"

"You wouldn't understand if I told you."

"You might try me out; no one else has called me so very dense."

Joe-Anne laughed. "Now you're huffy," she said, "and in no mood to listen to my vaporings; but I'll try to make you understand. For instance, there you stand—by all odds the most beautiful girl in our set—"

"Nonsense," interrupted Doris Marie, but she really did not consider it nonsense; she knew she was the prettiest girl in her set.

"No, let's be absolutely honest," protested Joe-Anne; "that's the only way—if we are to try to understand what I don't more than half understand myself. You are beautiful and popular—"

a leader—especially a leader in all we modern young people are trying to establish as an antidote to mid-Victorianism—and we are all glad when you deign to notice us.”

“For Pete’s sake, Joe-Anne, can your applesauce.”

“All right—all right, Sweetness; now, for once in your life listen quietly while some one else does the talking. We’ll just admit all I’ve said about you, and go on with the analysis. We’ve dissected you; now there’s me—your humble servant, to be a little more grammatical. We’ve been pals for a long time. Why? You usually tire of a pal in a few months; why haven’t you tired of me?”

“I don’t know,” replied Doris Marie, thoughtfully, “unless it is because you are the most interesting girl I have ever met.”

“Remember when you first became interested in me?”

“No; do you?”

“I most certainly do because I deliberately advertised myself for that purpose. You see, you had held the limelight for so long that I couldn’t seem to get a look-in—and I wanted some attention. I know I was far from beautiful—far from wealthy—not graceful enough to attract attention, not witty enough to get a hearing—at least not without a proper introduction, so I said to myself I’ll become Doris Marie’s chum. Then I changed the spelling of my name—told everyone it was changed and why—and presto! the deed was done. I had advertised myself as being different.”

“But didn’t you believe any of the stuff you told us about the change in spelling being necessary to change your luck?”

“Sure I did. And didn’t I prove my point? It did change my luck. But if I’d never cared to study along occult lines I shouldn’t have thought out a way to do it. I am interesting because I know something about a study that the rest of you are too indolent to take up. And because I am interesting I hold my own in our set although I really have nothing else to boast about. Today, if you were to decide that you were tired

of me, I could still hold my own—have a following quite as strong as yours.”

“I don’t doubt that for a minute,” replied Doris Marie, wholeheartedly—“and I shall never be ready to give you up. You are too stimulating.”

January first, 1923—a date to be remembered by the reader of this story because of the remarkable experiences of Boyd Hunter, which will furnish data for scientific facts, in the near future—facts and experiments destined to banish old age or rather to raise it from the dread period of decrepitude which is at present its domain. This story of Boyd Hunter will have accomplished much if it starts the reader on a study of the work of the scientists of today, and helps by its approval to prove, rather than to kill their demonstrable facts simply because some other scientist does not care to help advertise a rival. To banish old age is the goal of more than one scientist today. There must be a piling up of birthdays, and that is desirable; and when the many birthdays stand for wisdom and understanding as well as physical activity instead of approaching senility, the scientist will have justified his long years of labor and the halo of adoration will be bestowed upon him by grateful humanity. Let’s help on the good work by carefully studying the part Boyd Hunter played in it.

It was too warm for the usual New Year festivities—but Boyd Hunter was not troubled about the weather. He had something far more serious to worry about. This was his birthday. He was sixty-nine years old, and he looked seventy-five; yet he had confidently expected to conduct his very flourishing publishing business for at least twenty years longer. That business dwelt in the inmost region of his heart; it had been his God for many years—but, like most successful business men he did not realize that. He was a deacon in the church and he believed himself to be a good Christian, and he

sometimes thanked God for his success, while patting his own back as the sole author of it.

Boyd Hunter had considered himself in the prime of life—until a fortnight ago, when a curious symptom had challenged his attention and sent him to a doctor. As a result he had “gone through the clinic”—a procedure that is becoming quite the fashion. He had been given the final verdict on this, his birthday, and he had fled, instinctively to a secluded spot in Central Park where he hoped to be alone. It was hemmed about by a flourishing group of pine shrubs, still heavily clothed in their rich green verdure, and was a spot dear to lovers because it was so secluded and had a bench only large enough to accommodate two. Boyd Hunter had been there before, when he had some important business matter to consider, and he had discovered that when he occupied that bench, no one ever tried to share it with him.

Never in all his life did Boyd Hunter crave solitude as he did at this moment. He had received a terrible—a most unexpected shock, and his thin body still trembled from it although he was making a desperate attempt to bear up stoically. And in a way he was succeeding. For a brief moment he had forgotten his great trouble in the contemplation of a picture that floated before him. Had he seen two girls—had they looked at him as if they meant to speak—had he deliberately ignored them—had they tossed their heads and smiled contemptuously—had they noticed that he was suffering—trying to get away by himself—and would they tell about it? At that moment it seemed to him that he must get himself well in hand before anyone knew—what everyone must know very soon. To display emotion had always seemed to him rather cheap. A man should always bear himself stoically and with dignity—and he was confident he could do that, once he had gained control of himself. He must look the thing squarely in the face—why worry about those two flappers! He called them chickens, and that brought to his mind a ludicrous recollection of a

chicken he had seen, years ago, taken up in a whirlwind and carried away in a series of spirals, too much astonished to make a sound. How he had laughed at the time. Now he felt that there was a resemblance between his plight and that of the chicken, and although he managed a smile, there was no humor in the situation. He had smiled, but he realized at once that the smile was ghastly. It must not be repeated. No one must see him trying to grin like a damned death's head. Had he grinned like a death's head when he met them? Those confounded flappers! It was seeing them that reminded him of the chicken—but hold on! He wasn't thinking logically. Let them say he was looking white-livered if they wanted to. What did it matter, anyhow? This wasn't the way to get himself in hand. This wasn't the way to realize that he must die—die horribly—and very soon—that he had certain duties that must be performed—before he died—died horribly—

Quite without reason, he saw himself as the leading actor in a funeral procession—without any mourners. His attorney was there, of course—and with him was Doris Marie, the attorney's beautiful daughter—and Doris Marie was laughing. Well, she would do that. She always made fun of her elders, no matter what they did. She made a habit of calling people mid-Victorian, as if that were a crime—no, too silly to be classed with crimes. Doris Marie laughed and scoffed, and was charming in spite of her rudeness to those who merited her deference. He was glad she didn't belong to him—but why think of that just now? This was no time to be trying to despise Doris Marie. He had come here to think things out alone—get ready to face the dread future with the dignity he desired—

And then Boyd Hunter's precious solitude was shattered. A man had deliberately taken a seat beside him, and he was penned in between that man and the impenetrable shrubbery. It was quite evident that the intruder meant to keep him where he was. To get away, he must either step over the legs of his unwelcome seatmate, or ask him to get up and let him pass.

The thought of either course loomed like a disagreeable task,—but—he must be alone—he must—he must—

Boyd Hunter got to his feet abruptly—angrily. He looked as if he'd like to pulverize the intruder. Words were not necessary; anyone could have seen that he wished to pass, but the stranger did not move. His legs barred the way out. He waved a beautiful hand, beautifully kept, an authoritative hand—the hand of a man who was accustomed to being obeyed. He smiled, and at the same time shot a penetrating glance into Boyd's angry eyes—a glance that held like a magnet—that could not be evaded—that was backed by purpose—and after a momentary struggle, Boyd sat down again. He couldn't have said why he did it, except that he lacked strength to do anything else. Such impotence added to his anger.

"Don't hurry," the stranger said softly and pleasantly, yet with an undertone of command. "I have something to say to you that you'll find interesting."

"I have no wish to hear anything you can say," replied Hunter, gruffly. "If you are determined to keep this seat, be good enough to let me pass."

"The clinic gave you little hope," remarked the stranger, quite casually. "I'm here to tell you that I can do better by you. You'd better listen, don't you think?"

"What do you mean? You weren't one of that damned outfit; at least, I do not remember seeing you." Boyd Hunter turned to study the stranger. "Mean to say you were there?"

"I was invited in at one stage of the game," replied the stranger, "but you were not present. I had the pleasure of listening to the reading of various reports—and of hearing the verdict."

"Then you know—"

"Yes; they said cancer of the liver."

"And you do not agree with them?"

"On the contrary. Without doubt you do have cancer of the liver."

"Then why do you keep me here? Must you emphasize the the good news?"

"You are told that you have only a little while to live. I do not think you need to pass out so soon as they believe you will; but whether you do or not is for you to decide."

"For me to decide? You must think I have a lot to say about it! For me to decide! Do you think you are joking?"

"No; I am in earnest—very much in earnest. You may believe me when I say that it rests with you, as to whether or not you die of cancer, because if you care to come with me to my laboratory in France I can cure that cancer."

"Nonsense. I don't believe it. Everyone knows that cancer of the liver can't be cured. What sort of fakir are you? What kind of game do you think you can work on me? Battening on my helplessness—faugh!"

His tone was contemptuous to the last degree—his manner unforgivably rude—but the stranger was quite unmoved—calm, gentlemanly, sympathetic, with just a hint of an amused twinkle in his dark understanding eyes.

"Evidently you have not recognized me," he said, pleasantly. "It may be that you've never heard of me, although I can hardly believe that. My name is Hicks Jarou."

"Hicks Jarou. You don't mean it! *The* Hicks Jarou?"

"Oh, so you have heard of me?"

"Hicks Jarou! You don't say! Yes, I've heard of you. Aren't you the man who cured that fellow who was shot through the heart?"

"I am the man. There is but one Hicks Jarou."

"Say, that man *was* shot through the heart, wasn't he—or was that just a newspaper story?"

"He was shot through the heart—buried—resurrected—and he is alive and well today."

Boyd Hunter was silent for a full minute—no more. Then, as if having reached a sudden decision he asked "Why must I go to France? Why can't you do the job in this city?"

"My laboratory is in France, and I'm leaving on the steamer that pulls out tomorrow evening. I can get a booking for you, if you like."

"Couldn't possibly leave so soon. Couldn't possibly get ready. But I might appear at your laboratory a little later."

"You wouldn't. Your friends would urge against it, so would what you call your commonsense. Better come with me. If you stay here you'll soon be unable to leave your room. Yours is a case that should be taken in hand at once, to be successful. I can begin my treatments while we're going across. You understand that, personally, it makes no difference to me what you do. I simply offer you the opportunity to get well."

"But my business. Can't you see that I must have time to close that out?"

"Why close it out? Can't you believe that you are coming back to it? I, Hicks Jarou, tell you so."

"God! I wish I could be sure of that."

"Take a chance. You have everything to gain and nothing to lose. Leave your business in the hands of your employees. It won't suffer very greatly. Besides, if you don't do as I suggest you'll soon be leaving it, never to return. You have cancer of the liver, man; don't forget that! You have had it for quite some time."

"And you think you can cure me?"

"I know I can."

"Just give me an idea as to how you expect to do it."

"I use vibratory methods—with an additional kink of my own devising that you wouldn't understand."

"Did you tell those doctors?"

"No."

"Wouldn't they understand?"

"They wouldn't listen."

"I should think the whole world would know about it—if you can do what you claim."

"The world isn't ready to listen. When I'm through with you, you can go before the doctors who have just discharged you as incurable, and they will look you over and decide that they must have made a mistake in their diagnosis, because you couldn't possibly have been cured of cancer of the liver. You may try to convince them—for the sake of suffering humanity—but they will only tell you that you've been hoaxed. I know. It is done every day."

"As you say, I have nothing to lose—" Boyd Hunter was thinking hard.

"Nothing to lose, and everything to gain. Shall I reserve a stateroom for you?"

"Yes," replied Boyd Hunter, explosively. "I'll go. I always said I'd go to France some day—when I had time." Then he added ruefully, "but I didn't think it would be this way. However, get me the stateroom, please. I'm in your hands now."

"You'll not regret it. Tell your employees you'll be away six or eight months. Better arrange to take five thousand dollars, and have more sent if you need it."

Hunter leaned against the ship's rail, watching the receding city,—his beloved city—the only place in the world where he cared to live; he was wondering if he'd ever see it again, and trying to believe that he should. He was feeling very much alone—friendless and forlorn, and sick. He could not put entire faith in this mission that was taking him abroad. At this moment he was fearing that it was more than likely that he would never come back to this—the only country in the world, in his opinion, worth a second thought. And he was leaving it. If he had to die, he'd prefer to die at home. But he wanted to live, and there was a chance—but he could scarcely see the New York outline now, and he was very homesick. He was a fool to put any faith in Hicks Jarou. He would die of cancer—die among strangers—be buried in a foreign land. And who

would care? Who would care? He reminded himself that he was the only passenger on that great floating palace who had not shaken the hand of at least one friend who had come to wish him bon voyage, yet he realized that it was not altogether because he had no friends. There were a few business associates—a few fellow church members—his doctor, perhaps—his lawyer—surely there would have been some one who would have cared enough to come had he given them opportunity, had he not decided so unexpectedly to make the trip; but underneath this thought was the hateful suspicion that everyone he knew would really be glad he had relieved them of any such tiresome social duty—, that there was no one in the world who really cared where he went or when or why. Indeed, he was confident that his employees had shown a real pleasure in the knowledge that they were to run the business without him for a time. He was quite sure that his doctor was thinking what a relief it was to know that a strange physician would have the duty of trying to make his last days as painless as possible; and he knew quite well that his lawyer would gain more by administering his estate, than by managing his affairs while he was abroad for a few months, and would not regret the sad event that threw the extra emolument at his feet. Boyd Hunter was in a very pessimistic mood. And then he thought again of the two girls he had met in the park at the moment when he was seeking solitude, that no one might witness his despair.

Doris Marie Palmer, and Joe-Anne Burnham. He knew them very well. They were always together. Painted flappers. Acted as if the earth turned on its axis because they had so ordered. He had never liked those two girls, and now he was feeling actually bitter towards them, for their voices carried well and he had overheard all they had said about him. "Frightfully rich—and a miser—" were there many who thought that of him? and she shivers when she meets me—there's something so repulsive about me—and I make her feel like swearing—and who could blame my wife for leaving me—

Oh, my God! when I missed her so. Do others think of me like that? I don't believe it. That girl deserves—I'd like to give her what she deserves. If I get well—and I hope I shall—just to get even—good Lord, forgive me! Forgive me, Lord! I must be *crazy*! To be troubled by what that fool girl said—I *must* be crazy."

It troubled him so much to realize that two laughing girls had seen him at a time when he was too frightened to know how he appeared—and that he might, as a consequence have become an object of ridicule.

"I feel exceedingly well satisfied with you, my friend," said a pleasant voice at his side. Hicks Jarou had unpacked his steamer trunk and put his stateroom in order for the night—a task he always attended to for himself—and now he had come on deck. Hunter stared at him incredulously—with angry disapproval. Satisfied with him indeed. Exceedingly well satisfied! Palaver! What was the man trying to do to him? Why should he take the trouble to lie? Was he giving him a free Christian Science treatment? He knew himself to be in a mood that no honest man, trying to help him, could possibly approve. He hated himself for his pessimism, and yet he knew he had no wish to be coaxed into shifting over into the tiniest show of optimism. He actually preferred, at the moment, to feel worse rather than better. He courted a deeper, darker, sadder mood if only he could manage to achieve it—and he wanted to suffer in silence. He hated Hicks Jarou, just then, and took no pains to hide his dislike.

"Well satisfied," he repeated with a sneer; "exceedingly well satisfied! If you do, I'd advise you to keep it to yourself."

"Why?" asked Hicks Jarou.

"It would give your patient greater confidence in you," replied Hunter, rudely. "I'm not in a mood to satisfy any honest practitioner."

"Think of the old saw about the darkest hour just before daylight," advised Hicks Jarou, "and you'll understand me

better. It is much easier to help a man who has lost all hope than one who feels that, after all, there may not be much the trouble with him. You see only the unpromising present; I see what a fine future you have before you. When a few months later, you stand at the rail saying goodbye to France—”

“I don’t believe that will happen. I shall be buried in France.”

“On the contrary. Today, your doctor has been telling a few of your nearest friends that you will never return—that you have cancer of the liver and can never get well, and they are saying, ‘poor fellow’ and wondering who will benefit from your death. I smile when I think how they will look when you return.”

In spite of himself Hunter’s face lost a little of its look of woe. The fellow seemed so darned sure of himself. He made one see what he wanted him to see, and without making him feel like a fool for changing his mind so quickly. All of a sudden, he saw himself returning to New York—a well man. He saw himself walking into his beloved office—seated at his old desk—discovering errors that had been made during his absence—Lord, what a delightful vision! And what a shock it would be to those who were feeling that they could manage his business as well as he could. For a moment, he hoped he should find the business all at sixes and sevens. What joy it would be to jump in and set everything to rights again! He could do it—for a few years he ought to be able to do his best work—if he got well. But—of course—a man at his age—

“Age does tell,” said the man at his side, almost as if he had been reading his thoughts, “but as a rule it tells lies—just because we have allowed ourselves to subscribe to the doctrine that age must sooner or later get out of the running. One may feel as young as ever—as vigorous as ever, wiser than ever before—but if one looks old the world is going to count the days until he is ready for the grave and has made way for a successor.”

"Well, then!" exclaimed Hunter, as if Jarou were in some way to blame for it all. "I am old. I know it. I look older than I am. Anyone can see that I'm beginning to wobble at the joints. Why have I allowed you to persuade me to go to all this trouble just to prolong my life a few years more?"

"You don't want to die. I never met a man who had a greater love of life. You realize that you have missed so much that you should have enjoyed—that you might have enjoyed had you only understood how to live. You must have been rather handsome, once. You had dreams, once, and you haven't realized many of them. You know that you could do much better if only you could try again."

"Don't most men think like that when they realize that it is too late—that they can't go back and try again?"

"Perhaps. I am not interested in the men who cannot be persuaded that they might go back and try again. I am interested in a man like you, who, I believe, will make the effort to get back and pick up the pleasures he has missed."

"Get back," growled Hunter, again suspicious and on guard—"what do you mean by get back?"

"I mean," replied Hicks Jarou, slowly and impressively, "that with your consent and cooperation, I can send you back home not only cured of cancer, but as a man of not more than thirty years of age in looks, manner and physique."

"Rejuvenation?" queried Hunter a little less skeptically. "I've read of that, but I never thought I'd really be interested."

"You've read of the work of a few experimenters," replied Jarou, "some of whom are doing very well indeed; but I am all of a hundred years in advance of the best of them. I am so far in advance of them that they can't see me. When I take forty years from a man's age there is no camouflage about it. He is forty years younger in looks and ability and endurance—in every way except in memory, commonsense, and the knowledge born of experience."

"God!" gasped Hunter, "what it would mean to a man to have the knowledge of seventy and the physical attributes of thirty!"

"And when one knows that it is possible, how can one refuse to grasp the opportunity?"

"But if all that is feasible, why don't you yourself take advantage of your knowledge?"

"My dear man, I am more than fifty years older than I look. I have chosen my present apparent age because a scientist could not be much younger than I appear and gain even the grudging attention that the callow scientists of the period grant me today. I could be a man of twenty if I chose."

"How long would it take—this rejuvenation—supposing I were to decide to let you work on me?"

"I can do it while I am curing that cancer. You would not be losing any time. And there couldn't be a better time than while you are so far away from all your friends—at my private sanitarium. My advice is to let your friends know all about the cancer. When you see them again they will think you look so much better because you have been cured so miraculously. You would not care to tell them about taking the treatments for rejuvenation?"

"Not if I could help it," replied Hunter promptly. "I'd rather they thought the cure of the cancer did it."

"I had an idea you'd feel like that about it. Most of my patients do. That is another reason why I am finding it so difficult to get proper recognition."

"Of course I'd be willing to recommend you," hastily supplied Hunter, "insofar as I could without making myself an object of ridicule. I'd tell how you cured me of cancer anyhow."

"I understand. By the way, how much time will you require in which to make your decision?"

"I don't know; why?"

"If you were to begin while on this voyage you'd save nearly a week."

"How could I begin, here?"

"I require my patients to sleep most of the time for a week in order to get perfectly rested. Sleep, and eat very little. I'd give you a sleeping draught to get you started."

"Well, I don't know but that would be as good a way as any to get across. I hate the motion of this boat. I can't say that I'm looking forward to the trip with very great joy. In fact, I'm afraid I'm not going to prove a good sailor."

"So? Well, don't let that worry you. I'll not let you get seasick. Come to your stateroom and I'll fix you up so that you'll think you are sleeping in your mother's arms."

Boyd Hunter obeyed, and knew nothing more about that trip across the water. He slept all the way across. He was too sleepy to realize when he was helped off the steamer or when he arrived at Hicks Jarou's sanitarium, or exactly what was being done to him. He didn't care. His only wish was to find a comfortable bed where he could sleep without being disturbed. He had forgotten friends, business, cancers, and New York City. He hadn't a worry, or a pain, or any care as to his future, where he was going, what was being done to him. His only realization was that he was so sleepy he'd like to stretch out comfortably and drop off into slumber and be let alone.

CHAPTER III.

Eight months had passed since Boyd Hunter had so suddenly left his native city for a trip to France. Soon after he left, it became quite generally known among his acquaintances that his doctors had told him he had not long to live, and why ; and it was frequently said, as the weeks passed, that the poor old man was holding out surprisingly. No one expected to see him again, alive. He wrote occasionally to acknowledge the receipt of letters that had been forwarded to him, and sometimes he offered a suggestion, or issued a command, to his employees. When he did this it was quite in his usual style—vigorous, concise, exactly to the point, imperative in tone. Emphatically not the work of a very sick man, and therefore surprising—but after all wasn't that like him? He cared only for business and would naturally cling to that when his mind failed in every other respect. That was the comment most frequently heard. It was noticed, however, and mentioned, that his letters had not once given the name of the place where he was staying. They were postmarked from a little village in the mountains of France—a village so unimportant that it could not be found on the maps. He had once intimated that his letters home were so infrequent, because he was living at a place that was many miles from a post office, and got his mail at long intervals. It was generally believed that he must be at some health resort or sanitarium, and that he was too ill to take interest in anything except himself.

It was an odd place—this work shop of Hicks Jarou—bearing little resemblance, so far as a stranger could see, either to sanitarium, laboratory or workshop—yet some of the most astounding experiments in this astounding century had been

carried to a successful conclusion under that roof. The house looked like the home of an artist wealthy enough to gratify his whims, yet it spoke less of money than it did of comfort. The room where Boyd spent his time was as comfortable and home-like as the most exacting man could desire. There were servants, but Boyd never knew how many. All he knew was that everything ran as smoothly as the most perfect machine and without much supervision as far as could be discerned. He did not know, at that time, that his host had designed many contrivances that tended to make his housekeeping run so smoothly, and that, in due time this very curious scientist would be known as the savior of domestic life.

Boyd Hunter was the only patient in this exemplary sanitarium. He learned afterward that there was never but one patient admitted at a time, and that this one was more a subject of scientific experimentation than he was a patient. Hicks Jarou never troubled himself about anyone who was simply an invalid. In the case of Boyd Hunter he had found a subject to his liking, and Boyd was given every care and all the attention anyone could desire. He was yet to realize that he was under the care of a scientist so far in advance of all other scientists of his time that they caught only a glimpse of his seemingly winged flight through the mysteries not yet penetrated by other students, and consequently failed to get a hundredth part of the favorable recognition that should have been accorded him. One can't praise what one knows nothing about. Jarou understood that, and seldom blamed the world for its lack of appreciation.

There were not half a dozen men in the world who had been inside the laboratory of Hicks Jarou, which was built at some distance from the house where Boyd Hunter spent his time, and which, from the outside, looked like a well appointed barn on an up-to-date farm, except for the wonderful vines that covered it, and the flowering shrubs that concealed it from view. The world would have been astonished could it have understood a tenth part of what went on in that laboratory, as it was

astonished when the synthetic man was completed and introduced to an uncomprehending world, as described in a volume bearing the name of this scientist. He was the first to make the human heart beat for years outside the body—and to restore to health and vigor a man who had been shot through the heart and buried.

For eight months Boyd Hunter had occupied that perfectly appointed room, and during all that time no one but the attendants had come to see him. But he had been too somnolent to care. He remembered that he had come there to be cured of cancer of the liver, which had registered an appalling number of ohms—many more than had ever been counted in the worst case ever cured. But Hicks Jarou had never seemed to be in any doubt as to his final recovery, and after every careful examination of his patient, he would smilingly announce how many ohms had been crossed off the register since the first examination. It was all very satisfactory, because he had been able to comprehend that his improvement was steady even though so gradual as to seem slow. Meanwhile, he felt well. He had no fears as to his future condition. He believed he was being cured, when he gave any thought at all to his condition, which was seldom. He was convinced that he was given some sort of sleeping potion with his food, but if so, whatever it was never gave him any feeling of discomfort—and he did not worry about a possible bad habit; besides he was glad to spend so much of his time in sleep. It might, otherwise, have hung heavy on his hands. He had a vague recollection of a soothing voice in endless repetition of some rhythmical phrase, and believed that Hicks Jarou was trying to hypnotize him as he dozed; but he was too somnolent to have objected, even though it had occurred to him in a vague sort of way that some time in his past he had made a solemn vow never to allow himself to come under another's influence in any way.

Occasionally a basket of letters would be brought to him, and then would come a hazy recollection of a voice—a most monot-

onous voice—saying over and over, “tomorrow you will give your usual careful attention to your business correspondence.” The man who brought the letters would take dictation, if he desired such assistance, and the business would be despatched with such celerity and ease and efficiency that he would return to bed feeling greatly pleased with himself, and quite sure that the very complete rest he was taking was the best thing he could have decided upon. “I’m not getting a bit rusty,” he would assure himself, and then he’d declare that when he returned to God’s country he’d put his shoulder to the wheel—straighten his affairs p. d. q.—and make business hum in a way that would startle his old associates, who were doubtless expecting very soon to send flowers to his funeral.

Eight months of supreme tranquility. It was almost like eight months of living death—would have seemed so to Boyd Hunter under any other conditions. But when a man has been told that he has cancer of the liver in an advanced stage, and that he can live but a few months at most, and that he must expect to suffer horribly except when under the influence of increasing doses of opiates—it will be readily understood how very satisfactory such an entirely different program must be.

He was actually amazed when, in reply to a question he had not thought to ask before, he was told how long he had been living in that suite of attractive rooms. Eight months. Eight months, and this was the first time he had cared enough about it to inquire how long he had been there. Eight months. It didn’t seem like eight weeks. It hardly seemed more than eight days. Time had simply been of no consequence. He yawned and stretched luxuriously, and suddenly recollected that for a long time he had been obliged to be careful about stretching in the morning, because of a painful tendency to cramp in the legs. Now he stretched again just to see if he could bring on the cramp. He could not. Gee, how good it felt to stretch like that! How well he felt. He couldn’t remember when he had felt so absolutely fit. He stretched again—like a young athlete, and

twisted his body like a contortionist, until he was tingling from head to toe. He felt like getting up and bathing and dressing without waiting for assistance. Why not? In the name of all that was good, why not? Suddenly he wondered why he had accepted such assistance like a baby—why he had been cajoled into bathing and exercising—why he had been so willing to lie in that bed and sleep, like a bear in mid winter. Well, he was wide awake now. He decided to get up at once, hunt up his clothes, dress, and go out of doors. Come to think of it, had he been out of those rooms for one moment since he had entered them? If he had, he couldn't recall it; and yet he seemed to have a vague recollection of walking, walking, walking over rough roads, under strange trees, beside a calm blue lake, beneath a wonderfully beautiful sky—always with two attendants, one on either side, who almost carried him along, compelling him to keep on walking when he wanted to lie down under a tree and go to sleep. Well, if that had actually happened, it should never happen again. He was determined as to that.

He threw his legs out of bed, as nimbly and unthinkingly as he had done when a boy, and suddenly took notice of the extraordinary firmness of his flesh. He slipped off his pajamas. What had become of the obese lines, the flabby muscles, the liver spotted skin, the stiffened joints which had caused him discomfort for at least ten years? How he had hated such evidences of advancing age. But now! Now his body was that of a young man in the pink of condition. It was a beautiful body—supple, well muscled and strong. How well he felt! How full of life! How absolutely fit!

He ran his fingers through his hair, and with a boyish jerk of the head threw a recalcitrant lock off his forehead. A mop of hair—Good Lord! Hair! And he had been bald eight months ago. He gave his forelock a vigorous pull. That hurt all right. It proved that the hair was attached to his scalp. It belonged. He looked around the room for a mirror. He must

see how he looked with hair. Glory be! What would his business associates say to that! Hair! Where was the confounded mirror? It was then that he had asked himself why in reason a mirror had been omitted from a room that held every other convenience a man could wish for.

"Of course the boys will guy me," he reflected, again running his fingers through his abundant locks. "They'll accuse me of going to a beauty parlor, all right, all right; but I can put up with that—I've got the hair! Lord, how I wish I could see it. I'm mighty glad Hicks Jarou did this for me, while he was curing that cancer—but I do hope it is a good, decent gray—curly gray hair—that ought to be becoming."

He pulled out a hair for examination—then another from the opposite side of his head—a third and fourth; he was obliged to admit that his hair was not the beautiful gray that he had considered so suitable for a vigorous man of seventy years. His hair was red. It must be every bit as red as it had been in the days of his youth when the boys at school had called him Woodpecker. A luxuriant crop of red hair. No one would ever believe it belonged to him. He'd have to convince every man he knew that he was not wearing a wig. He'd be guyed incessantly. How he'd hate that—and what could he do to avoid it? It would be worse than being bald. Nearly all his business associates were bald—had been bald so many years, just as he had, that no one ever mentioned it. But his new crop of red hair would be mentioned. It would make him conspicuous. No doubt about that!

The door to his bedroom was pushed open, and his attendant appeared. "Hello" he exclaimed as if surprised, "you up? Well! Well! Looks as if I were out of a job. Dressing? You'll want the suit of clothes you wore when you arrived?"

"Please," replied Hunter, briskly. "Bring all my stuff, will you? I'm wondering if I brought a decent cravat. And say," as the attendant turned to leave the room, "what about a mirror? This room doesn't seem to contain one."

"Want to see what you look like?" asked the attendant, smiling.

"Got to see how to tie my cravat," replied Hunter, evasively. He did not want the attendant to guess how curious he was to see how he looked with his new crop of hair.

The attendant soon returned, and with him came Hicks Jarou.

"Good morning," said Jarou, pleasantly; "I rather thought you might be wanting to get about, this morning. Feeling all right?"

"Never felt better," replied Hunter, heartily. "No need to ask if that old cancer has been conquered."

"You are absolutely cured," said Jarou. "It was a most satisfactory proposition from beginning to end. You are free from cancer, and there is no more reason why you should fear a recurrence than there would be if you had never had one. In fact, I consider you immune. I believe you are less liable to have another than you would have been had you not taken this treatment."

"I don't know how to express my gratitude," replied Hunter. "Yours will be the easiest bill I ever paid, be sure of that; but of course I want you to understand that I realize you are entitled to more than money in a case like this. I'd like to do something for you—something that would really express my gratitude."

"That would not be impossible," replied Hicks Jarou, seriously; "in fact, I'd very much like to have you mention my work whenever you feel that you can help another by so doing. It seems to me that would be the most fitting way to express your gratitude. I am more interested in the sufferers you can direct to me, than I am in any other form of advertising you might give me—you'll understand that, I'm sure. At the same time, I must confess that I'd like you to appear before those doctors who said you could not recover, and ask them for

another examination. I'd like you to write me what they think of you now."

"I'll do that very thing," exclaimed Hunter with conviction. "I'd like to know, myself, what they will have to say when they see me. They can't go back on their records, can they? And I won't mention you until after they've finished wondering how I managed to get well. Then I'll tell them, as well as I can, how you treat cancer."

"Thank you," replied Jarou, quietly. "If you do that I'll have the pleasure of curing others who have been doomed to die. And now about that mirror. You have one, but it is in your dressing room—and until now you have not seemed to be interested in dressing rooms."

Jarou unlocked a door as he spoke, and Hunter stepped into a beautifully appointed dressing room, suddenly halting before a full-length mirror. He glanced in, then turned his head to see who was following him. *Who* was this red-headed young fellow—was it possible—there was no one present except Hicks Jarou—and himself? He glanced at the mirror again, and this time he raised his hand to brush back his crop of shining, red, curly hair. The reflection convinced him. He was—he actually *was*—looking at himself—not Boyd Hunter the man of a few months ago—the man he knew—but the boy he dimly remembered, the young man, Boyd.

"Had you forgotten?" asked Hicks Jarou, softly. "You seem surprised. Had you forgotten that you commissioned me to take forty years from your appearance? Behold yourself at the age of thirty! It looks like a miracle, doesn't it?"

"It does, indeed," faltered poor Boyd Hunter. "It—it's horribly uncanny."

"Don't you like it?" asked Jarou, sharply.

"I—I'm not sure. I guess I'm flabbergasted. I don't know myself. I'm like an apparition—done in color! It upsets me. I feel sick. I—I'll have to get used to seeing myself like this,"

and he turned away from the mirror, trying to smile, and achieving only a sickly grin.

"You're surely not hard to look at," said Jarou, smiling; "why turn away from that mirror as if you hated the sight of yourself? Why not stand right there and get used to yourself? Man, you are trembling like a leaf! What's the matter with you? Wishing you could go back to the doddering old chap of eight months ago?"

"Could I—you know—go back—if I wanted to?" There was hope in the eager young voice.

"You don't mean to tell me you'd want to go back?"

"No; no, I'm not saying just that. But—this change is too tremendous. Couldn't I just go back a little way—I'd like to be—perhaps forty-five or fifty years in appearance."

"You should have said that in the beginning. You did not."

"No; I suppose I didn't think you could do anything—at least anything like this. I agreed, I presume, without thinking how I'd feel, if you actually did manage it."

"Well, how *do* you feel? You told me just now that you never felt better? Didn't you mean what you said?"

"Yes; I meant that. I feel as young as I—eh—as I look. I feel like a very young man—actually—and yet I know I am nearly seventy years old. I think I can recall my past life as clearly as if I'd never done anything except live in the past. You have changed my body—but my mind remains the same."

"Surely you are not complaining about that! Didn't you tell me you'd like to be young again, retaining all the knowledge you had gained from experience?"

"Yes, I remember saying something like that. One frequently says things without expecting to be taken literally—I was joking—"

"Oh, no, my friend, you weren't joking; you paid me to do what I told you I could do."

"I didn't believe you could do it."

"But we agreed upon a price. You paid me—"

"I expected you'd make a great improvement—at least I hoped you could. I was willing to take chances. But if I had known you would take me literally—"

"I do not say one thing and think another," replied Jarou, stiffly, "and especially in business matters. I undertook to do a certain thing for a certain sum of money. I have done as I agreed. If you are not satisfied, I am sorry. I regret to say that I can not undo what I have done."

"I must go away from here looking like this? Don't tell me that! Heavens, man, don't tell me there will never be any change in my appearance!"

"Only such changes as time brings. You will grow older about as you did when you began to age. I should say that you became an old man in appearance rather earlier in life than was necessary. You do not need to do that this time. You'll have life easier, because you can begin where you were about to leave off. You have your business, your knowledge, your experience—everything to help you live your life as life should be lived. Really, I do not see what more you could ask. Honestly, now, don't you think you are acting rather foolishly?"

"Yes," admitted Hunter, miserably; "I suppose I am. But I'm terribly upset. I'll probably feel differently when I've become used to the change."

"I'm sure you will," replied Jarou. "Now hurry up and get dressed, and come into the dining room for your breakfast. You'll enjoy that better than trying to eat it here."

"This—eh—this change knocks me over—it—it actually makes me rather ill. Somehow I don't feel hungry. Let's skip breakfast. I'll have luncheon with you, instead—if you don't mind."

"I understand," replied Jarou, sympathetically. "You want to be alone. You must have time to get acquainted with yourself. Well, that's all right; only, old chap, you mustn't emphasize the pessimism. Remember, that was one of your failings, when you were an old man. Don't take it up again. It

wouldn't be in keeping with that glorious red head of yours—and the royal way in which you carry yourself. Well, au revoir. I'll see you at luncheon—unless you care to come into the garden before that, as I hope you will decide to do."

Hicks Jarou was gone, and Hunter was alone. He stood before the mirror trying to get acquainted with the trembling young god who looked back at him with frightened eyes—eyes that were experienced, disillusioned, rather hard and not young. An old mind in a young body. It was horrible. He didn't feel human. What was he going to do with himself? How could he go back home looking like this? How could he face his old friends? Who would believe he was the Boyd Hunter they had known? They'd brand him an imposter. Could he establish his identity? Even though Hicks Jarou should go with him and corroborate his story, who would accept it? They'd call Jarou an imposter also. Suppose they did accept his story—would he want his old acquaintances to see him now? He'd be jeered at by every small boy in town. He had been a deacon in the church for many years; could he go back to that now? He looked more like a foot ball player than a deacon. And if he could not go back to his old life, where then could he go? What could he do?

What could he do? It was the hardest question Boyd Hunter had ever tried to answer. It was terrifying. It became increasingly difficult the longer he faced it. He could not decide anything affirmatively while his seventy-year-old brain was protesting against that thatch of red hair. He must give himself time to get used to his youthful appearance. Meanwhile, he reached one conclusion that he believed to be absolute; He could never again, never, *never*, appear among his old associates. He was convinced that he could never make them believe that he was himself—and even if he could, his whole soul rebelled at the prospect of living among them imprisoned in a body that he knew they would declare made him look like a fool.

When Hunter appeared for luncheon, he had decided to say good-bye to Hicks Jarou. He would take his departure that very afternoon. Nothing should induce him to change that plan. He wanted to get away from everyone who had ever seen him as he appeared eight months ago. He was determined to begin life anew, and among strangers.

"Going home?" asked Hicks Jarou, when Hunter had announced his speedy departure.

"Not at present. Perhaps never again. I don't know. I must become used to my appearance before I can decide what to do—and I feel that it will be easier to make my plans for the future while surrounded by entire strangers."

"I hope you will finally decide to go back home," replied Jarou. "If you do not, how will you account to your friends for your continued absence?"

"I don't know. I can't decide that, yet. I can't decide anything."

"Why not remain here and let me help you?"

"Let you help me—good Lord, no! I've let you do too much as it is."

"Gratitude; gratitude," mused Jarou; "of what stuff is it made!"

"Don't jump to the conclusion that I'm going back on my promise," hastily put in Hunter; "I mean to do the right thing—but just at present I can't think how what I want to do is to be done. I was never so puzzled in my life. Perhaps, when I'm alone, the situation will become clearer—but I don't really believe it will. I'm a man without a country, without personality — without individuality. I feel that I have no past, no future, no friends—I'm nothing except a protesting old man in a strong young body that is clamoring for exercise."

"You are taking this change too seriously. You'll pull yourself together in time."

"I don't believe it. I'm utterly and absolutely flabbergasted."

"Flabbergasted?" queried Jarou, with an amused smile; "A new word to me—but expressive."

"It fits," replied Boyd, morosely.

"I can see how it might suit your present mood."

"It does."

"Some men are fortunate—some contented—some hopeful—" he smiled sardonically, and continued— "and *one* flabbergasted. Well, my flabbergasted friend, I will bid you good-bye—but only for a little while—"

"Only for a little while," repeated Boyd with undisguised dismay. He was feeling that he never again would see Hicks Jarou, if he could help it.

"A little while—as time goes. I'm confident that we shall meet again. I shall be interested, you know, in that advertising you are going to give my cancer cure."

"I'll write you about that—later—when I've thought out the best way. Understand, I can't say when or how—"

"Oh, I'm not worrying about that. As you are known to be a man of your word, I'm sure you will not disappoint me."

Jarou gave him a genial smile, and without a hand shake or other parting salutation, disappeared into his den, where a mysterious chemical compound was about to prove that what he declared to be his unseen occult teachers had not disappointed him.

Boyd Hunter packed his grips and left on the next train. He did not know where he was going. He had bought a ticket for a town of which he had never heard before, simply because he had happened to have just the sum required to pay for it in his vest pocket, and need not set his grips down in order to make change. He could get another ticket to some other place when he had reached the end of the trip paid for

by this one. He didn't care where he went so long as it seemed to be towards the jumping-off place.

His sojourn at the Jarou sanitarium had not taken more than one-half of the funds he had brought with him—and a part of the price he had paid by check. Afterward, he regretted making out that check—but now he congratulated himself that he had money enough with him to pay his expenses until he could decide what he'd better do with himself.

"The loneliest man in the world," he whispered to himself. "Didn't those girls say something like that about me? What would they say of me now?" Then he repeated what he had said of himself to Hicks Jarou: "I'm a man without a country, without personality, without individuality. I feel that I have no past, no future, no friends—." At this point, he covered his face with a worn newspaper that he had brought with him, and wept shamelessly. The loneliest man in all the world.

Later, when he idly glanced over the paper, he found an account of one of the gayest parties of the season, given by Mr. and Mrs. Stephen Palmer, to announce the engagement of Doris Marie to young Sidney Holt. "A fine young fellow," he thought, "the Palmers are undoubtedly pleased—but, how about the Holts? They've never approved of jazzy girls, and Sidney was to have studied for the ministry. I hope he breaks that engagement. He's too good to chase around in the wake of that flapper."

Hicks Jarou had also read that item—and a smile of amusement played around his mouth, as he packed the paper in Hunter's suit case.

CHAPTER IV.

Before Boyd Hunter had left the home of Hicks Jarou an idea had come to him that promised to help him out of his present difficulty; but he did not want Jarou to know that. He believed that if he remained in the house of the great scientist even for another night this idea of his would be guessed. He felt quite sure that the man must have considerable skill as a mind reader—and until he had fully decided what to do, he wished to be entirely alone where he could perfect his plans without interruption or outside influence. In the new home he had found he would be as isolated from the world as any sane man could wish, but he was not satisfied. His ticket had brought him to the little country village of La Fleur on the French side of the Pyrenees. It contained a post office. That was all that interested him at the time. So far as he could find out he was the first American that had ever visited the place, and there had never been an English visitor. The town had a visiting priest once a month, but no lawyer or doctor. One had to take the train and ride twenty miles if one needed either. Good. The more he learned of La Fleur the better pleased he was. No one he knew would ever come there. He could hardly be more out of the world and live. He realized that, and yet he wished to go farther. He would come to La Fleur for his mail and to post letters, but he would not live there. He must have an even more profound solitude. He purchased a decrepit bicycle—the best the town afforded—the only one as a matter of fact—and set out in search of a home where he could be as completely isolated as he desired, while his plans were being perfected.

Five miles from La Fleur he found an old couple who owned a tiny farm in a sheltered valley high up in the mountains. They had a spare room. It had been built on to their tiny

house by their very wonderful son who had paid for the farm, and then had died in the late war. They were surprised, overwhelmed, and just a little suspicious when they learned the amount this handsome young man was willing to pay for the use of that room, and for his board and washing for the next four months. It would pay all their expenses and leave enough to keep them in comfort for the remainder of the year. What could that beautiful young man have done to make him so anxious to hide himself away? They wondered, but decided that, after all, it was none of their business. So long as he paid his bills and gave them so little trouble, why should they not do their best to keep his presence a secret from the world, as he so much desired.

Boyd soon found a quiet nook under a big tree on one corner of the farm, where he could think without interruption. It was sheltered from the wind—from the hot sun—from the world. He built himself a comfortable seat, and a rude table to be used as a desk. Here he could write his letters—arrange everything—and be alone, while he worked out his plans for the future. He must make those plans very carefully. His was fated to be very much a mystery story—but there must be no tiny thread leading to discovery, as there always was in the many mystery stories he had read. Detective stories had been his one source of entertainment during the years when he had worked too hard to care for more vigorous pleasures. He had read them as a source of amusement, but now he believed that they were to help him prepare for the difficult years ahead of him. His first finished items were as follows:

Boyd Hunter was born January first, 1854. He was married to Mamie Jones on January first, 1893, when he was thirty-nine years old. His wife left him the first of the following June.

That much was history that could be easily verified by any inquiring mind. It may have been forgotten by his old acquaintances. He had never talked about his domestic trou-

bles—never mentioned his wife after she left him—never sought a divorce—never had wished to marry again, never had tried to win the attention of any other girl. It was said that his wife's behavior had made him a woman hater. His reticence was considered admirable. He was sure that there were many of his business associates who did not know he had ever been married; but he knew that when the matter was brought to their attention—as it must be—there were others who could supply interesting details. They must all be told now, that he had been married and deserted—God! how he hated such publicity. In all the years of his loneliness it had been nobody's business. Now all his little world would feel privileged to pry into the saddest moments of his life. Boyd Hunter writhed inwardly, but there was no help for it. Through no fault of his own he had become notorious—or would be if his plan for the future were not successful. He must bear it as patiently as he could. His youthful appearance had made many disagreeable things necessary, and he hoped his neighbors' curiosity wouldn't live long after it had once been assuaged. He added another paragraph to the written outline of the new life he was planning.

“Mary left in June. We could say she was in her third month of pregnancy. The child must not come too soon after her departure. Her condition must not have advanced far enough to be evident, or I, as a prospective father, would be criticised for not bringing her back home. And so I must not have guessed her condition. We'll say that the son was born on my birthday—that will make it easy for me to remember. That would make his birthday January first, 1894, which would make him thirty years old, by the time I get back home. I look about thirty years old, now. Yes, the plan will work. I can appear as my own son. It is the only way out. The most they could say would be that the son was extraordinarily like me—but that is often true of fathers and sons.”

Now he was ready to write his letter. He would write to

Stephen Palmer, his attorney. That would, of course, be the natural thing to do, and there was the added advantage of sending his letter to a man who talked his business over with his wife, and who had a wife who couldn't possibly keep a juicy bit of news to herself, even though it came to her as a business secret. Let Mrs. Palmer read his letter, and it would be all over town in less than twenty-four hours—this interesting news of Boyd Hunter's son who was coming to New York City to take charge of his father's business, and who bore his father's name.

How should he word that letter? Let him get the facts in mind. Now! He had left New York because he had been told that he had an incurable disease and could not live more than six months at best. He had left because he had hoped to be cured—but none of his friends had known about that. Should he tell them? He'd rather not mention Hicks Jarou at all—but he had promised him faithfully to tell how he had been cured of cancer of the liver. Of course, as matters now stood, he could not keep that promise—could not explain his cure—because he had decided that his friends must believe that he had died of cancer of the liver. No. Notwithstanding his promise, he could not claim to be cured, but his son could say that his father's life had been prolonged quite miraculously, and that all pain had been removed. That was surely sufficient commendation to enable him to tell Jarou, should the necessity arise, that he had tried to keep his promise; and at the same time it was not flattering enough to make anyone else seek the Jarou sanitarium. He most decidedly did not want any of his friends to visit that sanitarium. Perhaps it would be wiser not to mention Jarou's name at all. After long and earnest thought he decided that he'd just write Palmer that he had gone to a sanitarium for treatment—had been relieved of pain, his life prolonged, but that he had grown steadily weaker, and now realized that he must die. Realizing that, he had sent for his son, of whose existence he had only lately become aware,

and he was now coaching him to take his place in the business world. That coaching idea was excellent. It would account for the facility the son was bound to show when he took up the work in his printing and publishing establishment.

There was another point to be considered. The death of the boy's mother should be casually alluded to. Of course he would not be expected to go to New York, as his father's heir, and leave his mother in France. A nice boy, such as he wished to be considered, couldn't possibly do that. He'd better say that his mother passed away a year or two before his father found him. Boyd Hunter had no reason to think that his wife was still living. On the contrary he believed she must be dead. It had been so long since he had heard from her or about her. He'd made inquiries, too. He wished he could be certain that she was dead, but he really did not anticipate any trouble from her, even if she were not. So many years had passed since she had left New York, and no one who had known her there had ever heard from her in all that time. It would be quite safe for her son to say, if the question came up, that his mother died two or three years ago. Better make it definite. Three years would do nicely.

Now his own death and burial must be carefully planned. He must die before his son left for New York; it would be considered inhuman for his son to leave him among strangers, and he was determined that this son, who was himself, should not be criticized more than was absolutely necessary. He wished him to have a happy time. He believed he deserved it. All the dreams of his youth might now come to pass—if only he could arrange these preliminaries so carefully that no troublesome questions would ever arise. So he must be dead and buried before purchasing a ticket to New York. And there must be a real corpse and a real grave, and a headstone and a priest; then, if any long-nosed spy came to glean information that would add to his son's discomfort, he would find what, perhaps, he had not expected to find at all. Boyd Hunter

grinned happily as he entertained this thought. He decided that it couldn't be very difficult to find an old man with one foot in the grave who would suit his purpose. He could look about for such a man during the long weeks that must elapse before he could get matters at home in readiness for his son's appearance. And he'd be good to the old man—make his last days comfortable. Surely there could be nothing wrong about that. He would arrange it so nicely that the son could speak quite casually of his father's burial place. There wasn't one chance in a million that anyone would ever want to come away up there to find it—but it would be there to find in case any one should so decide.

What he now registered in his mind as "the facts in the case," were gathered together and in order. It remained only to write the letter to Stephen Palmer. What should be its tone? Coldly businesslike, or as one friend to another? Perhaps he'd better make it friendly—somewhat appealing—since he must now write of a matter that no one had dared mention in his presence since those dark days when the world had discovered that his wife had left him never to return. He could not give his son a businesslike introduction and let it go at that. He must make a friend for his son, and to do that he must rake up the ashes of his past. Of course he must make it very clear that he had not known, when his wife ran away, that there was to be a child. All his friends must believe that, had he guessed her condition, he would have made more strenuous efforts to bring her back. He must say frankly that his only thought at the time had been that if she did not want to live with him—if she wanted to run away—let her go. That, while he'd prefer to have her remain, he could live without her. His pride dictated that position. He'd rather live alone than to live with a wife who had no love for him, and so he would take no steps to bring her back.

That was really the truth, and being fact, did much to hold his story together. He reviewed it all, now, with a view to

giving this explanation a solid background of as many actual facts as could be brought together. While he did not expect to be obliged to mention this domestic trouble, yet certain questions might arise that would make it necessary. There might be some who had known more about it than he suspected, and who would not hesitate to ask questions of the son that they would not have asked the father. He must be prepared for surprises. This story of his must be surprise proof. These were the facts! Now to review the past, once more, in search of further facts.

His wife had become restless and dissatisfied. Nothing he could do seemed to please her. This was all history. There were times when she appeared to hate and despise him. That attitude had angered him. There had been recriminations and quarrels—never particularly bitter but decidedly unpleasant, especially to a tired business man who was working very hard to get himself established. At first, it had been rather fun—decidedly exhilarating—to make up and begin all over again, as happy together as a pair of turtle doves. But he had gradually tired of that. He had wanted to come home to a quiet nest, a smiling wife—and he had sworn like a trooper on one occasion when he found her in tears. Should he tell that? At the time, he had felt that he was justified in such an exhibition of temper—any tired man would have felt exactly as he did—and she had really deserved a lesson. She had carried on her hysterical mannerisms quite long enough. Once he had threatened to shake her—and advanced as if to carry out his threat—but he had restrained himself. He couldn't actually punish a woman, no matter how richly she deserved it. He recalled how like a spoiled child she had seemed to him, and how sincere he was in his belief that a thorough spanking would work a very desirable change in her. Spoiled children were often most charming between their exhibitions of temper. Her fault was not exactly temper—it was hysteria. Hysteria. Yes, that was it—but could he say so? Now that he was to de-

clare that she had been pregnant, would that not account for her hysteria and leave all the blame for him to shoulder?

It had never been easy for Boyd Hunter to accept criticism. His reactions had always been so violent and pugnacious that his acquaintances had soon learned that if they had any criticism to make they'd better make it behind his back. But now he would be dead. They'd hardly say very much against a dead man, but what they did say would quite likely be what they had thought—and he had heard that detestable Doris Marie tell the almost equally detestable Joe-Anne that his wife could not be blamed for deserting him. No, he would not admit that he'd ever found fault with his wife. His son must not be obliged to face too much criticism of his father. He must be in a position to treat girls like Doris Marie with extreme scorn and bitter contempt. Well, he would be dead, and even though they did think he should have been more solicitous of his wife—well, there was nothing criminal about any of it. He could make any reasonable person understand that he had been the one who was punished, because for years he had been kept in ignorance of the fact that he had a son. There was the idea! Any father would understand that he had been more than sufficiently punished—and he had furnished an excellent reason for never having told any of his acquaintances that he had a son. He decided that he would never have discovered that fact at all had he not determined to make a visit to the grave of his wife, on this, his first trip to France. Of course, he would visit his wife's grave—and there he met his son! How beautifully the story was shaping itself! What a wonderful idea! He'd work out that meeting with his son very, very carefully, always bearing in mind that it would be the son who would describe the meeting.

Now he could go back home without running into endless joshing about his rejuvenation. He could go back, take up the work that was dearer to him than anything else that life could offer, go about among the business acquaintances that

had stood to him in place of friends, live in the environment that suited him. He could also join in the entertainments of the younger set—have some of the youthful pleasures that had been denied him. He had been too poor to play when young; he had been obliged to give himself exclusively to the task of making a living. But now he was rich; rich and young and strong—yes—and very good to look at. He wouldn't be at all surprised if the girls would like his appearance—perhaps be quite crazy about him—but did he desire that? Did he? Yes, in a way; although he believed that he should never marry again. After all, he was seventy years old—or would be when he got back to New York. He was really too old to marry. He didn't want to be bothered with a wife—but it would make life interesting if he were to become popular with girls. He never had been, and he had often wished to be—and there was one girl, in particular, who needed to discover that the world was not made especially for her pleasure, her comfort and her convenience.

He drew a deep breath, smiled happily, sprang into the air to grasp the limb of a tree, and swung back and forth like a boy. Life was good. He was going to be very happy, and he deserved happiness. How young he felt! How full of life! And soon he would be back home in li'l ol' N'York.

CHAPTER V.

Mr. Palmer wore an air of suppressed excitement when he appeared at the dinner table in his pleasant dining room—a fact that was quickly noted by his better half. Such a disturbance of his usual calm and somewhat detached and lofty manner was unusual, and not particularly attractive. It seemed to cheapen him, but she did not tell him so. Life with him had taught her too much for that. Mr. Palmer had been educated at West Point and he carried himself accordingly, even though an attack of flu with a subsequent attack of heart trouble had prevented his taking up the life of a soldier as he had planned. But he had become a very successful lawyer, and as a result was far wealthier than any of his fellow graduates, whose plans had not been forestalled.

Mr. Palmer seldom permitted himself to appear really excited about anything. He classed most exhibitions of excitement among the vulgar displays of the uneducated and untrained. A man who tried to represent the best that West Point could turn out always had himself under perfect control. He really believed that, and so on this particular evening he was unsuccessfully but valiantly trying to suppress the most determined wave of excitement that had ever mounted to his carefully cultivated brain. But Stephen Palmer could not deceive his wife. She had lived with him too long not to know at once that he had news to impart which was of no ordinary nature. She had also lived with him too long not to know that nothing was to be gained by trying to hurry him. The more carefully she kept from him her observance of his air of suppressed excitement, the more quickly would she hear what it was all about. And so she ignored him, quite politely, and chatted with her daughter, Doris Marie, about the party they were to give on New Year's day.

"New Year's day," repeated Mr. Palmer, vaguely, and as if trying hard to show interest in something that did not interest him at all, "why—eh—that's the first of January, isn't it?"

"Naturally," began Doris Marie, pertly, but her mother silenced her with a quick frown, a mysterious smile, and an almost imperceptible shake of the head. Doris understood the warning. This was the time for her to keep still; something of interest—news of importance—might be expected, if no silly mistakes were made, and she would be included in the consequent discussion. Doris Marie did not obey her mother, as a rule, but she was enough like her to try to avoid doing anything that might deprive her of a bit of interesting news. She quickly and silently agreed with her mother that her father's vague and silly remark was like a sign pointing to something that he considered important. He was never either vague or silly unless something had happened to astonish him, and no small matter could ever do that.

Doris and her mother continued their conversation about the party. Who must be invited, who might be left out. They couldn't possibly include everyone they knew or everyone whose invitations they had accepted. There were persons whose invitations they did not care much about; such persons need not be invited, etc., etc.

"What about Sidney Holt?" asked Mr. Palmer. "Shall you invite him?"

"Of course," replied Doris Marie, somewhat sharply.

"Think he'll come?"

"Why not? Broken engagements are not considered, these days."

"Broken engagements?" repeated Mr. Palmer, catching at those two words in a conversation that did not interest him, and immediately becoming suspicious. "Doris Marie, have you broken off with Sidney Holt?" he spoke sternly. It was evident that the very thought angered him.

"It was broken off by mutual consent," replied Doris Marie calmly. "Don't get apoplectic, Dad; it occurs frequently."

"In this instance I have no doubt that you are to blame."

"Why the implied criticism of your only daughter?" inquired Doris Marie, coolly and with unconcealed patience. "Couldn't Sidney be as disappointed in me as I am in him?"

"Undoubtedly," replied Mr. Palmer with heavy sarcasm.

"All right; you'd hardly want me to marry a man who didn't approve of me."

"I want you to be the kind of girl of whom a boy like Sidney Holt would naturally approve."

"You know so very little about Sidney Holt," murmured Doris Marie, her exasperating air of patience still apparent. "The engagement was broken because he told me we couldn't be married until you and his father had set him up in business. He thought one of you should also buy us a home, and the other should furnish it."

"Of course he was joking," faltered Mr. Palmer.

"Of course he was not," retorted Doris Marie. "Most of the boys believe they should be helped, or that the wife shall earn her own living—and it's all right if they can put it across. But I'm not going to marry a boy like that."

"I thought Sidney Holt such a fine young fellow," lamented Mr. Palmer.

"Sid's all right," replied Doris Marie, "I like him no end to pal about with—but I'm not going to marry him. By the way, Mother, if we invite Sid to the party we must ask Myrtle Browning, too. Sid seems to think her old man will be willing to set him up in business—just to have him in the family."

"I'm tired of the same old crowd," exclaimed Doris Marie a few moments later, as she and her mother went on with their plans for the New Years party. "They're getting on my nerves—all but Joe-Anne. She's always interesting. Now if she were only a boy—or if there were a boy like her—but there isn't. And we've got to fling that party. It's our turn to enter-

tain. If only we could have just one person—at our party—a stranger—preferably a handsome young man—whom we had never before seen,—wouldn't that be great!"

"Of course you know such a thing would be impossible," replied her practical mother. "How could we invite anyone who had not been properly introduced, and how could he have been introduced if we'd never seen him?"

"That might be managed," interrupted Mr. Palmer, quite unexpectedly. It came like lightning from a clear sky, it was so unexpected.

"A stranger—never introduced—" squealed Doris Marie, "Oh Dad, do you really mean it?"

"I said it might be managed, didn't I?" replied Mr. Palmer, with ponderous playfulness.

"Nonsense," replied his wife. "In stories, perhaps, but never in real life. There must be proper introductions."

"Give me a handsome young man to play with, Daddy dear," interrupted Doris Marie, "a real man, young and unknown and interesting," she continued gaily, "and I'll love you forever, and give you a dozen of my sweetest kisses."

"One would do," replied Mr. Palmer, absentmindedly, and then suddenly checking himself, he added lamely, "that is, one at a time."

"Poor Daddy! he shan't be kissed at all if it hurts like that. But tell me, dear, could you, or couldn't you produce a young man who would measure up to my specifications? Haven't you a hunch or two up your sleeve? What did you mean when you said it might be managed?"

"A young man is expected to arrive early in the morning of January first—the boat gets in about six. I am to meet him."

"And bring him here, you splendiferous daddy?"

"I hadn't thought of that. I'm not sure he would agree to come."

"Why don't you tell us whom you are expecting?" asked Mrs. Palmer with a little frown of annoyance.

"No, no;" expostulated Doris Marie. "Don't tell just yet. It is more mysterious, this way. This is stacks of fun! Go on, Daddy; what is he like?"

"I don't know; I've never seen him."

"Ge-e-e!" squealed Doris Marie, in an ecstasy of delight. "Splendiferous! He's never seen him, Mother! Go on, Daddy; how old is he?"

"About thirty, I believe."

"Thirty? That isn't so very young."

"I'm told that he was born in 1894."

"And I was born in 1906. Some difference. But that really doesn't matter. I've always preferred men older than myself; they are far more interesting. Go on, Daddy; is he handsome?"

"I don't know. If he looks like his father, as I last saw him, I should say decidedly not; but his father as a young man was not bad looking, in fact he was considered very good looking."

"It is some comfort to hear that you know his father," interjected Mrs. Palmer.

"Knew," corrected Mr. Palmer. "His father is dead."

"Good," exclaimed Doris Marie, unfeelingly; "that makes the son much more desirable. And his mother?"

"Died some years ago, I understand."

"Better and better. Brothers and sisters?"

"He was an only child."

"Daddy, you are a perfect angel. You are as romantic as the devil. I love you to distraction. Go on, dear. Spin out the romance just as long as you can before getting down to the harrowing details."

"What makes you think there may be harrowing details?"

"Oh, I know enough of life to realize that we've got to have 'em, sooner or later. But go on, tell us some more."

"Guess it's time to give you a little of the prose, so listen:

The young man's father and mother separated before he was born. I have done his father's legal business for many years, and until three months ago I did not know he had a son."

"Ah, ha! Mr. Stephen Palmer," crowed Mrs. Palmer; "now I know! You are talking of Boyd Hunter."

"Yes," replied Mr. Palmer, "of Boyd Hunter, and of his son, Boyd Hunter, Jr. The son arrives the first of January to step into his father's shoes."

"And you've known about him all this time," accused Doris Marie, "and never told us. I don't think that was a bit nice, Daddy; you might have known how interested I'd be." She pouted deliciously and her father looked at her with tender affection. She was his spoiled baby—but she was also a very charming daughter—when she chose to be so considered.

"I wish, Doris Marie, that you would not talk of young men quite so freely," the mother interrupted, fretfully, "so—so informally—so audaciously—so unreservedly—I don't know how to describe it, but it sounds—almost brazen."

"It isn't brazen," replied her daughter; "it is only being natural. Of course I'm interested in young men; all girls are; then why shouldn't we admit it? I think of every new young man I meet as a possible husband—but so far it hasn't taken me long to see that none of them had the qualifications I demand. However, I never get discouraged. It is fun to go on trying. And now I'm interested right up to the hilt. I'm glad I've ditched Sidney, for something tells me that I'm going to have a fine time with Mr. Boyd Hunter, Jr. I think I'll go with you to meet him."

"I think you'll do nothing of the sort," interrupted Mr. Palmer, hastily, and with conviction.

"Why not? The poor young man would love to be welcomed. He'd love to be welcomed by me. He must be feeling horribly lonely—and since you are going to bring him right to the house—"

"Who said I was going to bring him to the house?" inquired Mr. Palmer explosively, or as nearly explosively as he ever allowed himself to appear. His daughter certainly did have a way of throwing him off guard when he least expected it.

"I did," replied Doris Marie, calmly. "I want him here where I can study him before any one else has seen him. Understand, Mamma? He is to be our house guest."

"But, dear, don't you think—"

"Mother Palmer, I've told you what I think. I want Mr. Boyd, here, as our house guest. If you won't arrange it, I can call on him at his hotel, I suppose."

"Would you do a thing like that?" demanded Mr. Palmer.

"Why not, Daddy? I'm interested. I've simply got to see what he's like. I'd get Sidney Holt to go with me."

"Sidney Holt! And your engagement just broken?"

"Oh, that's all right. Sid would do anything for me. You see, he wants me to help him win Myrtle."

"And this is the type of young person we've given this weary world," groaned Mr. Palmer.

"Why wouldn't it be a good idea to bring the young man home with you?" asked Mrs. Palmer, suddenly persuasive. "To be obliged to go to some hotel on a holiday—it would be lonely—a stranger, you know—under your care, too, in a way! And then, if he were already here it would simplify matters so far as an invitation was concerned—and if he were still in mourning it wouldn't be like going to a party, you see—because he'd be right at the house—like one of the family. And as you were his father's legal adviser—and knew his mother and all that—and will likely become his legal adviser—why, dear, of course it is up to you to make him comfortable. It really is, isn't it? Why, seems to me that the only thing you *can* do is to bring him here."

Thus did the doting mother play up to the adored daughter, and although some instinct warned Mr. Palmer that it wouldn't be at all wise to bring the young man home, quite as if he

were already a relative, and he really didn't want him in the house where he might have to dance attendance and help to entertain him, yet he knew he'd be governed by the wishes of the majority. It had happened before. Many times. And he was seldom one of the majority.

That evening, when Mr. and Mrs. Palmer were alone, the wife learned all the details of the Hunter affair. Up to now, Mr. Palmer had kept the matter to himself, because Hunter had suggested secrecy until the time arrived when it could no longer hurt him to be talked over—and Palmer had respected his wishes even more zealously than Hunter had expected or desired. But Mrs. Palmer, was, after all, really getting the information in so dramatic a manner that she could never by any possibility keep it to herself, and so it happened that Boyd Hunter's plan would be advertised as thoroughly as he could wish. The only trouble was that it was to be acted upon in a manner he had not foreseen and could not desire. If he had known that he was to be made a member of the Palmer family over New Year, for instance—but luckily he never guessed that.

"All Hunter's friends knew that he had cancer of the liver," Mr. Palmer was saying, "and that he couldn't possibly get well. But he seemed to think he had found a man who could cure him—some one who has a sanitarium in France—and that is why he went abroad so suddenly."

"And he didn't get any help at all?"

"He wrote that he was helped—he believed his life was prolonged, and he declared he was relieved of all pain—which, of course paid him for going. Then, later, he wrote me that he could not get well—that it was only a question of weeks—and that he wanted me to get things fixed up legally so that his son could step into his shoes without any difficulty. He seemed to have everything thought out most carefully. He wanted me to fix up any papers he had to sign and have them forwarded as

soon as possible—all of which I attended to—but he said his son would remain with him until the end.

“His son. Boyd Hunter’s son! How strange. Weren’t you awfully surprised?”

“Never more so in my life. But after all, why should we be? It is often done, you know, by wives who think they’ve been misused.”

“What has been done? What are you talking about?”

“Why, keeping the birth of a child a secret from the father. It is a mean thing to do—as a rule even harder on the child than it is on the father. I can see by the way Hunter has written me that he would have made an exemplary father. He seems to have forgotten nothing that would make life easier for his son.”

“And the son will be well off?”

“The business is good—and there are some excellent securities—and there is the old home—one of the best properties in his neighborhood—a very fortunate young man I should say.”

“I wish he were not so much older than Doris Marie.”

“His age will make little difference, I fancy, if Doris Marie decides to marry him.”

“No,” conceded the mother, patiently, “I suppose not.”

Boyd Hunter’s death was duly announced in the New York papers. Mr. Palmer wrote the announcement because he felt that no one else could do his old client justice, and please the son as well. He meant that announcement to be a tribute that young Hunter—his new client—would appreciate. But he was not responsible for the excellent portrait of Mr. Hunter—evidently taken when he was well and vigorous—that appeared in one of the Sunday journals. This journal had another photograph, showing a lovely bit of mountain scenery supposed to be the background of the sanitarium where Hunter’s last days were spent, and this, also, was a surprise to Palmer. The

noticeable thing about this photograph was the omission of the name of the sanitarium. And there was a picture of a grave under a cypress tree, and a neat shaft of marble bearing the name of the deceased, the dates of his birth and death.

"Morgue stuff dug up by the newspaper," decided Mr. Palmer, and thought no more about it.

Boyd Hunter had left nothing undone that was necessary to the success of his plan. There was even a corpse in the casket, when it would really have served the purpose to use rocks as weights. The corpse was that of a very old man, who had died of old age—and the handsome young man who provided the funeral said he was his father. That had surprised the one family who had known the old man, for they had always thought him to be quite alone in the world. That was before the handsome son had chanced to find him—most unexpectedly—just as he was about to give up all hope of ever seeing his father again. The sad thing about it was that the old man had been too feeble-minded to realize that his son had come to see him, and that henceforth he would have every care that could be given him. The kindly family had been well repaid for all they had done for him, and they attended the funeral when he was buried.

If ever anyone tried to be disagreeable about it, the only question they might find of interest would be "why was Boyd Hunter, Sr. living like a feeble-minded tramp when Boyd Hunter, Jr., found him?" But there wasn't one chance in ten thousand that such a question would ever be asked. The son would give no hint concerning the corpse in that coffin, and who was to guess the truth? And if it were asked by some snoop-ing enemy, whose doubts had been aroused, couldn't it be said that the old man had lost his mind at the last and wandered away—perhaps his money had been stolen—no one would ever *know* about that even if there were suspicions—oh, it could be fixed up somehow! That was the easiest part of the story. The plan had been worked out to perfection.

A cable had been sent telling Stephen Palmer when the young man would sail—on what steamer, and when he would arrive. Now the rest was in the hands of the Fates. He would spend the time, on board, by studying the modern young man, and trying to learn what he must do, what avoid, in his effort to appear as young as he looked. And he soon came to understand that his greatest problem would be “How am I to control my mind? How can I avoid showing how much I despise the younger generation? How can I pretend to think like these addle pated nincompoops! Can I ever train myself to giggle so inanely—to laugh so like a braying jackass—to chatter so like a monkey, to preen myself so like a strutting peacock?” And then he began to realize the enormity of the task he had set himself. Then he began to doubt the perfection of his plan, and he almost wished he had not decided to be his own son.

CHAPTER VI.

As the great ship eased into its slip, Boyd Hunter gazed eagerly at the waiting throng on the wharf. A year had passed since he had last seen the city where most of his life had been spent. It was his seventieth birthday, and he was coming back to his own country, young, strong, well, full of vitality, vibrant with hopes for the future. He had never before been away from New York longer than a month or six weeks at a time, and now it seemed to him as if he must find everything changed; and he realized that his old acquaintances would seem almost like strangers,—not because they had changed, but because he had. That was one more of the discomforts he must endure because of the surprising change that had taken place in himself. He seldom thought of the transformation in his personal appearance, except when he looked into a mirror, principally because he had made no friends since leaving Hicks Jarou's sanitarium, and there was little to remind him of it. He had accepted it so easily, in fact, that there had been almost nothing to warn him of the many surprises his new life among his old friends had in store for him. He believed he had foreseen every difficulty, and prepared for it. He had impressed upon himself the fact that he must be constantly on guard—that he must never forget for one moment that he was now his son. He realized that he would, of course, recognize old friends, but that they would not know him—and he knew he must never forget and show surprise because they did not. He must remember not to speak to any of them until introduced; he must also remember not to show recognition of any place of interest until it had been pointed out to him. He really believed that would be about the extent of the dangers that must be side-stepped, except what might be encountered in his office. He was thinking of Stafford, his stenographer, now, Stafford who had been with

him for more than twenty years, and who was more like a private secretary or even a brother than he was like a stenographer. No one had known him as Stafford had. Would the old employee suspect? Would he observe little business mannerisms that he himself was not aware of—mannerisms that couldn't be inherited? He was just a little afraid of Stafford. It might be better for the son to discharge him. But an old employee—and one so very efficient—the best man he had—really the best friend he had in the world—he'd have to think that over very carefully. Life in his loved office wouldn't be as interesting if Stafford were not there to share it with him.

His eye caught a familiar form. Yes, there was Stephen Palmer. He had suspected Palmer would come to meet him. He grinned down at him, then, suddenly recollecting, he looked far away over the crowd and kept on grinning as if very much amused about something he saw in the distance. He was rather glad to know that this first meeting with an old friend would take place so soon, and under conditions that would tend to cover up any nervousness he might show. He felt more afraid of meeting Stephen Palmer than anyone else—except his lynx-eyed old stenographer. If Palmer accepted him as "old Hunter's son"—unreservedly, without one suspicious glance, then he believed he could carry out his plan without fear. He hoped that the old attorney would not detain him long. He would excuse himself on the ground that he was tired—he would say that he had decided to take a taxi and drive at once to his father's old home—that he entertained a strong—perhaps a sentimental, desire to get settled as soon as possible. Anyone ought to understand that, and not keep him talking. They might say that there was no caretaker and no servants and that the house had been closed—but he would smilingly reply that he felt quite sure that he would be able to find a bed to sleep in, and he could take his meals out. He would assure them that he was accustomed to looking out for himself. No one would be allowed to persuade him against carrying out his plan. He

was surprised at the fierceness of the longing that was impelling him to get under his own roof as speedily as possible. What it would mean to him to be at home once more—and alone!”

“No need to ask if this is Boyd Hunter’s son!” His hand was taken in a warm grasp. His shoulder was cordially thumped. A pair of friendly grey eyes were smiling into his. “I’d have known you anywhere,” exclaimed Palmer; “you are the image of your father when I first met him.”

“I believe I am like him,” replied Boyd, quietly. “I could see the resemblance myself, when I met him, and that is rather unusual, isn’t it—for a son to see himself in his father?”

“I think it is. We usually wait to be told by strangers of such resemblances. My boy, I am glad indeed to make your acquaintance. Just step this way, please; I want you to meet my wife and daughter.” He was leading the way. Boyd’s heart sank. “To meet my wife and daughter!” His daughter. He did not know how to side-step this situation. It was one for which he had not provided. He longed to side-step—cut and run. He didn’t want to meet anyone’s wife, and more especially anyone’s daughter at that moment; nor did he wish to meet any old friend—not even one of his old employees—and here was Mrs. Palmer whom he had never liked! And Doris Marie, whom he most heartily disliked—not as a young man would dislike her, but with the detestation of an old man who has been criticized, flouted, peered at by some young nincompoop, who owed him at least a modicum of reverence. He wanted to go straight home and up to his own rooms—the bedroom and study where he had almost lived for years; and he wanted to go at once, had planned to go at once—yet here he was being towed along, by a friendly arm across his shoulder, to meet a woman and girl in whom he could not feel the least bit interested or could have felt interested even under more auspicious conditions. Now, he actually felt that he hated them both and always would, and that he wished he might be sending

flowers to their funeral—something of that sort, so exasperated had he become!

“I’m sorry they took so much trouble—” faltered Boyd, making a weak attempt to be polite, and at the same time trying to hang back, “and I am really not presentable—couldn’t I be excused? There’ll be time enough, you know—and when I’ve doffed my travelling suit—”

“Oh, come now! No apologies. You didn’t think, did you, that we’d let the son of one of my oldest friends come to a strange city unwelcomed?”

“You are most kind, I am sure,” he was interrupted. They had arrived. He was being presented to a rather large and overpowering lady with prominent light blue eyes—a lady whom he had seen many times, but who had never before considered it worth while to show him any social attentions. He was being presented to a young girl with brown eyes and hair that was almost black, an exceedingly vivacious and stylish young lady who did not appeal to him at all. He frowned when he acknowledged the introduction and regretted that he could not remind her father that, not so long ago, when she was in the office he had advised that in his opinion the child’s future welfare, if it was to be good, lay in a faithful application of hourly spankings. He had often thanked kind Providence that he had not been burdened with a daughter like Doris Marie Palmer. He would never forget how she and Joe-Anne had criticized him, and would never forgive them either. Doris Marie was giving him her hand with quite a patronizing air, and telling him that she was glad he had made the journey in safety, and was looking so perfectly spiffy because she was so desperately in need of one more man at her New Year party.

“I do not go to parties,” he replied shortly, and as if he had thereby settled that question for all time.

“I expected you’d feel that way about it under the circumstances, being practically in mourning and all that,” replied Doris Marie frankly, “but of course you won’t really be going

to a party because you will already be there. I thought of that the first thing, when I heard you were coming."

"My daughter should have given me time to explain that we are hoping to take you home with us," interrupted Mrs. Palmer.

"That is very kind, I'm sure," replied Boyd, with chilly politeness, "but if you will excuse me—you really must, you know, because I am most anxious to see my old home—my father's old home—the home where he lived so many years—I can hardly wait to see it—"

"I know—I know," interrupted Mr. Palmer. "I understand exactly how you feel about that. But really you'd better not be in too much of a hurry, my boy. Better take a little advice about that—don't you think? That old house has been closed for a year—there are no servants—it is not habitable—and you couldn't possibly get anyone in during the holiday season. It is cold and dusty. There has been no caretaker. You'd simply hate it. Better come to us, as my wife suggests. We'll do our best to make you comfortable."

"We are not going to allow you to argue the question," added Mrs. Palmer, placing a proprietary hand on Boyd's arm. "I couldn't be happy to think of you all alone in that dreadful old house on New Year's day. I'm simply not going to allow you to do anything of the sort."

"Then let me go to some hotel," urged Boyd. "I shall feel quite out of place at a strange house and in a strange company—and I'm quite accustomed to living at hotels alone on all the holidays."

But no. Even as he spoke he was being steadily and relentlessly drawn to the big limousine beside the wharf. He felt exactly as if he had been arrested and was on his way to prison, and there was no hope for him. And there really was no hope for him. Doris Marie had looked hard at her mother, and that lady had understood that it was up to her to lead the young man home, and was grimly obeying silent orders.

It was not until he was seated in the car beside Doris Marie that Boyd realized why he was considered so much more desirable as a guest than he had been a year ago. For a few seconds he had forgotten that he was a young man, now—a bachelor, well-to-do and not bad looking. He suddenly perceived that he had become the prey of a match-making mother who fully understood the value of being first in the field. There would in all probability be other match-making mothers. He had read about them. He had even had some experience, years ago, after his wife had been gone for five or six years, and it was considered time for him to make other matrimonial arrangements. Well, he'd show them that he would not be putty in their hands. He had had enough of married life. He was not a philanderer by nature. He had really loved his wife, and it had hurt him because she had chosen to leave him. No one ever knew how that had hurt him; but he had been too proud to try to get her back. He had forgotten that hurt years ago, however, but he had never cared to take another in her place. He did not plan to do so now—and if he were to marry it would most certainly not be to a child like this insolent-eyed Doris Marie, who had painted herself to look like a woman of the streets. She reminded him of one of the Japanese dolls he had seen displayed in toy-shop windows, except for her look of sophistication, which he considered most disagreeable.

Mr. Palmer was driving his own car, and his wife sat beside him. It was not easy to carry on a sustained conversation with them, and he was left to the companionship of Doris Marie, whose idea of agreeable conversation was of a nature to afford him profound amazement. He was as unused to the modern girl as though he had spent his entire life in the wilds of Africa. One can be quite isolated in New York City, from a social point of view, and still be a very successful business man. He had started out with the determination never to employ women in his business. That idea had been born of the knowledge that his young wife was of a jealous nature, and would not tolerate

good-looking stenographers in her husband's office, and he had had no desire to make her unhappy unnecessarily. He could just as well employ a young man. After his wife left, there remained with him a feeling of animosity towards all her sex, and he soon made it known that no young woman need apply for work with him. So, he had missed the education that girls in his office would have afforded him, and he had absolutely no clew to the mental manifestations of Doris Marie. She chattered and he listened—grunting occasionally by way of reply—looking as if he'd swallowed bitter medicine—and thereby amazing her quite as much as she amazed him. What could she do with such a tiresome stick? How make him see her? Didn't he have eyes? Could it be that he was already engaged? Even so, would that prevent a fellow from treating a girl civilly? Finally she took her case of cigarettes from her bag and offered him one. She had been waiting for him to offer her one of his, and this gesture was considered a delicate rebuke on her part.

"I do not smoke," he said curtly.

"Couldn't you have said 'thank you; but I don't smoke?'" she asked, with her charmingly impudent grin.

"No; because I do not thank any girl for offering me a smoke."

"The father of his country!" apostrophized Doris Marie, gazing at her companion with her hands clasped under her pointed chin. "Say, Mr. Hunter," she added, "do you know, you made that remark sound as if it came from a man seventy years old."

"Seventy years old," echoed Boyd, more than a little startled; and then he hastily but lamely added "as old as all that?"

"Every bit," replied Doris Marie, calmly. "You are the oldest young man, for one of your age and general appearance, that I have ever met. I've read of mid-Victorian, but I'd place you a generation or two before the dear old thick-waisted queen of revered memory. I remember meeting your father

once or twice in my father's office and he seemed to me to have just made one good jump out of the dark ages—"

"If you please," interrupted Boyd coldly, "we will not discuss my father."

"Now don't get huffy," replied Doris Marie, who was at last having the time of her life in her self-imposed task of waking this young man up, "because I was just going to compliment your father. I was going to say that, compared to you, he was as up-and-coming as a mad bumble bee."

Boyd Hunter made no reply to this bit of impertinence, nor did he smile, although he understood from her provocative grin that he was expected to treat her remark as smart. He paid it no attention, because all at once he found himself trying to see himself as he must appear to this girl—trying to understand wherein he failed to appear as young as he looked—wondering if anyone else would accuse him of talking or thinking or acting like a man seventy years old. There was danger in that. Evidently she had pointed out a handicap that he must overcome. Instead of disliking this child so intensely that he could hardly be civil to her, should he not be grateful to one who did not hesitate to tell him what she thought of him? Could he not find her useful? Why not? He assured himself, arrogantly, that he could not be made unhappy over her opinion, no matter how adverse, while he might discover danger signals that would be useful, and decided that it would be wise to try to tolerate her.

"If you please, me lord," continued Doris Marie, with exaggerated meekness, "do you object to my smoking?" She blew a slow-moving spiral of smoke through her nostrils as she asked the question, as if to emphasize the mockery in her voice.

"Object?" repeated Boyd, trying to get an intimately casual tone in voice and manner, "why should I? And what good would it do, if I did?"

"Meaning you are nothing to me, oh miserable worm," replied Doris Marie, promptly. "Just do as you damn please."

"Well, that would be one way to put it. You aren't anything to me, you know."

"And if I were?" asked Doris Marie archly.

"Thank God, I don't have to think of that. If I had a daughter like you I'd chuck her into a convent."

"How sweet of you!"

"You asked a question. I answered it as honestly as I could."

"I love to hear a young man tell how he'd bring up his daughter. Are you also interested in unhatched sons?" Boyd took refuge in dignified silence. "You say," continued Doris Marie, musingly, "that I am nothing to you. How long, Grandpa, must it be like that?"

"Only a hundred years," snapped the harrassed young man.

"But suppose I want to be a great deal to you," suggested the girl daringly. "Suppose I decline to wait a hundred years. Now, dear, don't get the idea that I am proposing to you," she quickly added, seeing his expression of disgust. "This isn't a case of love at first sight, for I am quite sure that I disapprove of you quite as whole-heartedly as you do of me."

"Why?"

"Because you are such an infernal stick," was the unexpected reply. "You may be every bit as good and wise and proper and holy as you think you are, but I don't believe it. In these days, when a young man declares he is an angel with honest-to-gosh wings, all the other young people demand an opportunity to pull the wings. No camouflage tolerated these days, you know. No one except a fool—or an infernal stick—would attempt it—and you don't look like a fool. I'll tell you what I think. Your old hypocrite of a dad kept you concealed in a cave up there in the Pyrenees, and you've never had a chance to be young and human. You need training. Here," and she touched her breast dramatically with her right hand, "here you behold your

trainer. You won't like what I'm going to do to you, but it will be good for you, just the same."

"Am I supposed to say thank you?" asked Boyd, with a chilly smile.

"No, my child, you couldn't do that, and be honest. You have your lips stretched in a sickly grin now, as if you were about to have your picture taken, but your eyes look as if you'd like to hit me."

"Spank is an excellent word," murmured Boyd, and Doris Marie broke into a hearty laugh.

"Good," she exclaimed; "I really didn't think you had it in you."

"I am supposed to be a young man," thought Boyd Hunter, drearily; "I shall be judged and treated and entertained as a young man. If this girl is a specimen of the youth of today, what in creation am I to do? Even if I decide against the social life—give myself strictly to business as I have always done—will that serve to guard me against criticism that may prove dangerous? How am I to protect myself—and my secret?"

The more he thought of it, the more convinced he became that in idle criticism would lurk the greatest danger to his plans. And for the first time he got an illuminating glimpse of the change that had taken place in the view-point of youth since he was a boy. For the first time he could see that to give himself strictly to business, as he had done in his youth, would not now be taken as a matter of course. He was poor, then—had his way to make in the world. That excuse for retirement from all social pleasures would not now be accepted. He would be criticized. Had there been nothing to criticize, he would not care what was said—but he was convinced that there was certain danger in criticism. He must walk carefully—live and learn—and Doris Marie was favoring him with more of her undesirable and unsolicited conversation. He must listen—try to learn—and never forget that safety lay in silence. From now

on he would cultivate silence—listen and say nothing. “The silent young man!” That should be the description others must be forced to give of him. “He is very quiet. No one can guess what he is thinking. Sometimes he even disdains to answer a question—just looks at you with inscrutable eyes.” Boyd could almost hear them saying that, and it gave him a wonderful feeling of relief. “The silent young man!” He was glad he had thought of that. It would be an easy part to play, and it certainly could not get him into trouble.

“Do you know,” Doris Marie was saying, “I’m not going to call you Mr. Hunter. And I don’t like Boyd very well—it sounds so good and Mamma-boy, you know. Not that that doesn’t fit you, for it does,—but it won’t fit you at all when I’m through training you. I’ve decided to call you Boydicum.”

“What—w-h-a-at?” gasped Boyd, and his seventy-year-old soul quailed in its dismay. Boydicum! She’d really dare call him — *him* — Boydicum? She had been sufficiently insulting without that. He couldn’t allow her to call him such a name—he wouldn’t allow it—he absolutely would not allow it—yet, how could he prevent it? That was the question with which he was speedily faced. How could any man prevent a spoiled girl from doing whatever she had decided to do—unless it chanced to be something for which he could have her arrested?

“Yes,” continued Doris Marie, happily, for there was nothing on earth she liked better than to hear herself heckling a young man, “Yes, Boydicum. And you are to call me D. M. Don’t forget—D. M. All the young people call me that when they don’t make it plain Damn. D. M.—Damn. Get it?”

Boyd made a faint sound that might mean an assent to her question, but he had reached a point where articulation was difficult. There had been nothing in his life to prepare him for the privilege of calling a girl D. M. because it sounded like damn.

“You see,” continued Doris Marie, “I really thought of Boydicum before I had met you. It’s an awfully cute name.

I thought I'd like to know a fellow who would just fit that name. You don't—not now—but you will. Wait till I've trained you—then you'll be the real thing. I'm going to introduce you to the bunch as Boydicum, and that will help them to overlook your tragic sissyness. I'll explain that you are really not a sissy but a regular devil when one knows you. I'll give it to them as a secret—a profound secret! I'll make them think you're trying to put something over—and then when you're absolutely too awful for words, they'll take it as a joke, and you'll be top-hole without any effort. See? Some idea, I'll tell the world. You'll thank me for it, one of these days, Boydicum.”

“May be; but I doubt it,” groaned poor Boyd.

“Oh, you will. You see, you don't know the young of your species as I do. You've been living in a glass cage—something like that. You're unsophisticated to the nth degree. You're just a new-born puppy. Without me to help you, you'd be like a lamb thrown to the wolves. You'll realize all that very soon—see if you don't—but not as soon as you would without me to protect you.”

“I wonder to what I am indebted for your extreme kindness and solicitude,” asked Boyd with a cutting edge to his voice that is seldom found to perfection in the young.

“I'll tell you,” replied Doris Marie, as if tickled half to death with the opportunity, “I'm going to be very frank—I warn you, very, very frank, Boydicum—and you are not to shrivel up like a sensitive plant that's been stepped on.”

Doris Marie blew a final cloud of smoke through her nostrils and threw the remainder of her cigarette away. It was the third she had lighted, and all had been fairly well consumed before being discarded. There was a speculative light in Boyd's eyes as he regarded her. He was wondering why anyone wanted to smoke—and more especially a girl whose mouth was pretty when not distorted by a cigarette. But Doris Marie read the expression quite differently.

“You are wondering,” she gurgled, “what I can say that is more offensive than what I have already said. Come now—confess!”

“Well, since you invite it, let it go at that.”

Doris Marie glanced at her parents to learn whether or not they were eavesdropping. Not that it would have made a great deal of difference to her if they were, because she made it part of her business and pleasure to shock them. She considered them too old-fashioned for tolerance, and because she really loved them she tried to educate them enough to raise them above the criticism of the more caustic and observing of her friends. Her worried parents knew that she made it a point to call a spade a spade, and to make occasions for so doing when they did not spring up spontaneously. The world must be taught that it held nothing too indecent to talk about—and that with plain speaking it lost all semblance to indecency. She adored that doctrine and worked it overtime. Now she was invited to be as plain spoken as she pleased, and she was about to shock a good-looking young man into according her an attention that he had been withholding. Once win his attention and she believed he would be hers—to play with as she pleased.

“Well, Boydicum, it’s like this: there are not many men of your age who can afford to marry. You have a house, and your house needs a mistress. You are a stranger, here, and I’ve been considering you as a possible husband.”

“Good Lord!” ejaculated Boyd, with feeling.

“Yes, I had you sized up all right; I knew you’d be shocked. But you’ll get over it. You have only to remember that girls of today do not believe in pretending that they do not want to marry, when they do. We’re all husband-hunting, and we’re all out to win. That doesn’t mean that we jump at the first offer we draw; it means we’ll marry when we find the man we want—if we can get him—but we study him carefully before we accept him.”

"And you always have the opportunity to accept him?" The question was asked carefully. He desired information and hoped he gave no indication of the disgust and amazement she had aroused.

"Oh, no," replied Doris Marie, cheerfully; "it is like everything else in life—one can't always win. But we try to be good sports. If the man we want doesn't want us, we don't go into a decline and expire of galloping consumption as our grandmothers did; we look about us with a view to making another choice. That's why you needn't shrink like a sensitive plant just because I say I am considering you as a possible husband. I might find that I did not like you at all."

"Yes? and vice versa?"

"Absolutely. On the other hand, you might find me charming."

"I might."

"How much dislike you managed to get into those two words. Positively insulting. But you can't hurt my feelings that way. You see I understand you too well to take anything you say very seriously."

"How do you manage to understand me so well when you've known me less than an hour?" Boyd felt it to be quite a triumph to be able to ask that question as casually as he did.

"I began to study you before I saw you at all—just as soon, in fact, as I heard from daddy that you were coming. I considered your father, and your mother, and their separation, and your father's devotion to his business—Oh, I studied you carefully. And I had a long talk with old Stafford, much to his disgust. Oh, I worked hard! That's where I have an advantage over you. You weren't thinking of a possible wife—you weren't, were you?" she asked a little anxiously.

"Lord, no! And I'm not thinking of one, now. I don't intend to marry, nor do I expect to change my mind about silly fool girls during the next ten years."

"That's all right. Everything is working exactly as I had planned. You're not girl crazy—which is a great help to me. Don't you just love to make plans and have them work out, step by step, precisely as you thought them out?"

"I'd love it if they did," replied Boyd somewhat wistfully; "but in making plans one can never seem to prepare for the joker."

"The game wouldn't be interesting if one could," said Doris Marie, with what Boyd considered greater wisdom than she had yet evinced. "Girls in the olden days could never get all the fun there is to be found in the game of husband-choosing, because they had to pretend that they weren't looking for a husband, and had decided to be old maids, and couldn't possibly be interested in a man until he'd proclaimed his mad desire for them—say, I'm getting my pronouns mixed or something. I seem to have one poor man going mad over several maids—but never mind a little slip like that; I guess there's more truth than grammar in it anyhow."

"Your home is some distance from the heart of the city, is it not?" asked Boyd, who knew quite well where it was, but was hoping to change the trend of his companion's conversation.

"That means," replied Doris Marie, "that you'll be mighty glad when we get there. And I don't blame you. I have been giving you some high-powered talk—but I had to do it. You see, I want you to understand that I am interested in you, before any of the other girls have an opportunity to say the same thing. I want you to realize that you must give me a fair chance, that it is up to you to do that because I have laid all my cards before you. It wouldn't be sporting of you to turn me down before we've had time to get well acquainted with each other."

And at that moment, to the intense relief of Boyd Hunter, the car came to a stop before an old-fashioned house in the Sixties, and he was invited to alight by his smiling host and hostess.

CHAPTER VII.

There are few of us who have not, at some time in our lives, nourished a secret belief that, under more fortunate circumstances, we might have won fame on the stage. But that was not true of Boyd Hunter. He had never wished to be an actor, in fact, had cared so little for the drama that he had not attended the theatre half a dozen times in his life. He did not believe an actor could be decent, or honest, or a Christian, or in any way dependable. Yet here he was, an old man in a young body, taking the leading part in a scene that was as strange to him as the leading part in a cinema production could have been. And he flattered himself that he was doing so well that he was being accepted as the real thing. He was being introduced to a group of youngsters—all under twenty-three years of age, with the sophisticated airs of forty-five. He was being introduced as Boydicum, and he was keeping his temper. "You are to be nice to Boydicum," said Doris Marie—"but not too nice, because he belongs to me."

"For how long?" asked Joe-Anne, lazily.

"No one knows," replied Doris Marie cheerfully.

"Will Sidney Holt be here, this evening?"

"He has been invited."

"Did you ask Boydicum to be nice to him, or shall you ask him to be nice to Boydicum?" Joe-Anne's eyes danced with mischief as she asked this, and deep dimples played in her cheeks. Those dimples were ravishing when they danced like that, but Joe-Anne did not like them because she said they would form themselves into long, deep wrinkles when she got older.

"Joe-Anne is being mean," Doris Marie explained to Boyd. "You see, Sidney Holt and I were engaged quite some time, and we broke our engagement last week."

"I'm sorry to hear that," responded Boyd, with real feeling in his voice, and Joe-Anne giggled.

"Don't take Doris Marie too seriously," she said; "she may open the cage door and let you go when you least expect it—and perhaps when you won't want her to. Doris Marie is nothing if not temperamental."

"I am not temperamental," denied Doris Marie; "I'm just being sensible. If other girls were as sensible as I am, they wouldn't be seeking a divorce in a year after the wedding day."

"We are the ones who show good sense," chimed a voice in the doorway. Sidney Holt had arrived and Myrtle Browning was with him. It was Myrtle who had spoken. She looked triumphant. Sidney looked rather sheepish.

"Engaged, already?" asked Joe-Anne, with her customary directness.

"Better than that," crowed Myrtle; "married."

"You don't mean it. When did it happen?"

"About two hours ago. Companionate marriage. It doesn't take long."

"And your folks agreed to that?"

"They had to. I told them I'd go and live with Sidney without marrying him at all, if they didn't agree. So they went with us."

"How in the world did you ever come to think of that stunt," asked Doris Marie, of Sidney. "Did you have that in mind, the other day, when we talked things over?"

"No," replied Sidney, apologetically; "a man doesn't have much to say in a case like ours, does he?"

"Only when he wants to side-step," interrupted Joe-Anne. "You'll speak fast enough when you find that the arrangement doesn't suit you," she added, mockingly.

"I'd been reading about companionate marriage," Myrtle was explaining, "and I decided that I'd like to try it. If Sydney and I had been obliged to wait until he got established in business, we couldn't have been married in years."

"But I can't see how you expect to live?" asked Doris Marie, who had not read of companionate marriage. "Did the respective dads play up?"

"I'm going to stay on at home just as if we weren't married," explained Myrtle, "and Sid will stay at his home; but we'll visit each other whenever we like and of course we'll go everywhere together just like regularly married people. The two fathers will start Sid in business, and if he makes good, Sid's father will buy us a home and my father will furnish it. Of course that will all depend upon whether we love each other—as we get acquainted—"

"We're waiting for the congratulations," said Sidney, a little edge in his voice.

"Do congratulations go with companionate marriage?" asked Joe-Anne in a tone of surprise.

"Why, not?" snapped Myrtle.

"Oh, I'll not explain—if you don't feel the difference. When I get married, believe me I'll not be in such a hurry that I can cut out the trousseau, and the wedding gifts and the brides maids and the big wedding—and all that goes to make this the big event of a girl's life."

"I should say," said Doris Marie, thoughtfully, "that Sidney is the one to be congratulated, and we must all wish Myrtle everlasting joy. Companionate marriage seems to me to have been invented especially for boys."

"It may be all right," said Joe-Anne pacifically, "and of course it's the latest fad—but I shouldn't like it. It seems to me that it tends to rob a girl of social standing. When I marry I want to be accepted immediately as a citizen of influence."

"Is there any reason why we shouldn't be," asked Sidney, "when our parents back us up?"

"All parents will feel obliged to back up their own progeny," replied Joe-Anne. "They'll declare that their own can do no wrong, but they won't feel that way about other people's progeny."

"Indeed they won't," declared Doris Marie, with conviction. "They will say the others had to marry in order to remain virtuous."

"Well, perhaps not that," interrupted Joe-Anne, pacifically; "but you can see for yourself that no one will know where to place you. You'll be in the debatable list—"

"Is that where you mean to place us?" demanded Sidney; "is that what we may expect from our friends?"

"The attitude of the bunch you've been going with won't count," explained Joe-Anne, sensibly. "We kids love to declare that we run the universe and we do to an appreciable extent—but there's a limit. You see, we don't foot the bills for the entertainments, and the entertainments we like best are usually given by parents who are rather rigid in their views. First one of them will forget to send an invitation—and then another—"

"For Pete's sake," implored Doris Marie; "do cut it out; you're spoiling my party. And say", she added hastily, "don't tell mother about the companionate marriage. I'll explain it to her later on—when I can make her see that it is all right—"

"Myrtle, it is time for us to go," said Sidney, coldly, and they withdrew at once.

"They've met the enemy," paraphrased Joe-Anne, "and they are ours, and I'm darned sorry."

"I think you were rather hard on them," said Doris Marie. "It isn't for us to make things difficult for them."

"It is for us to look this companionate marriage stuff squarely in the face. If we want to advertise ourselves as in need of reformatory measures—all right; but I'll tell Judge Lindsay, right now, that I'm not his kind of a girl." The talk was interrupted by the arrival of other guests, and again Boyd heard Doris Marie saying that they were to be nice to him, but not too nice, since he belonged to her.

"Our affair has gone farther than the silly episodes in which we of the younger generation usually indulge," she explained; "but there have been no petting parties, nor will there be until

we know that we are meant for each other. Boydicum is very particular in such matters—ours must be the ideal relationship or no relationship at all. We are agreed as to that.”

Joe-Anne grinned and turned to Boyd, whom she had considerably drawn into a cozy nook out of the direct lime-light. “Already,” she said, “Doris Marie is showing the results of that companionate marriage business. She is becoming much more sympathetic towards established customs.”

“Was she fond of Sidney Holt—has his new relationship hurt her?”

“Not a bit. She could have had him if she’d wanted him—and she really stuck by the engagement longer than she would had it not pleased her parents so mightily. You see, they were judging Sidney by his parents, of whom they are very fond; they hadn’t an idea that Sidney was as modern as he is—or just what his modernism implies.”

“What does it imply?”

“It makes the majority of our young men look upon marriage as a means of livelihood. It never once occurred to Sidney that Doris Marie was worth working for. If her father could have been persuaded to give him a pension or something—well, Doris Marie wouldn’t stand for that. Her father was not given an opportunity to refuse—which he would have done unless she had adopted Myrtle’s tactics and threatened to live with Sid without being married. The young folks seem to think that gives them a strangle hold on the parents—Oh, it makes me tired!”

“But you’re one of the modern young people—I should say—” began Boyd, with a meaning glance at her exceedingly brief party gown.

“You’re criticizing my gown,” said Joe-Anne, with a grin. “Well, I can’t blame you. I’ve often wondered how our style of dress would appear to one who had been existing in the wilds—unless of course he came from a country where they

don't dress at all—just grass skirts or a strip of cotton wound about the body. You don't like my gown?"

"I think it absolutely indecent," replied Boyd, with feeling.

"Good. You just stick to that, say it whenever you get a chance, and you'll have a slogan that will win distinction. One must be different in some way, these days, or one gets absolutely lost in the shuffle."

"Do you, yourself, enjoy the exposure?" asked Boyd; "somehow" he continued, "you don't seem quite like the others—"

"I'm not—but neither am I a prude. At first, I hated going half naked; now I'm used to it I rather enjoy the freedom it gives. I don't like the way we paint and powder and pluck our eyebrows—and so, as you see, I follow at a distance—do just enough to get by. And I'm one of the few remaining fossils who believe in love and a hero who will come out of the clouds and steal one's heart away, and with whom one can build up a home and be happy ever after."

Doris Marie joined them, giving Boyd a little understanding smile as she linked her arm in his. "I've got it all fixed up," she said happily. "Now, if you make any bad social blunders, you'll be excused—"

"But Doris Marie," interposed Joe-Anne, "you're all wrong. Let him be himself, He'll be more interesting—distinctive, you know—all that sort of thing—"

"Not at his age, Joe-Anne," replied Doris Marie with conviction. "A young man could carry it off—but he is thirty years old. He can't afford to be different from the bunch."

"I don't consider him too different to get by," replied Joe-Anne.

"Won't you let me be the judge as to that?" asked Doris Marie, a trifle too sweetly. "It can't make any great difference to you, you know," she added, "while my happiness may be at stake—"

"Oh you blessed fraud, do stop your posing," interrupted Joe-Anne with her good natured grin. "You may impose on others, but you can't on yours truly."

Joe-Anne drifted away and Doris Marie took Boyd into her confidence in such a way that he felt as if it would require some extraordinary effort on his part to tear himself free from his tentative position as the property of this most disagreeable girl. "I've got them all guessing," she said, "I've said, quite mysteriously, that you are not what you seem, but that I'm not going to give them the tiniest clue to your really wonderful personality."

Boyd understood that she was paving the way for a proper reception of whatever he might do that would arouse criticism, and he silently blessed her for that.

Doris Marie led him into a corner to give him a lesson in dancing. He had confided to her earlier in the evening that he had never learned to dance, hoping that would serve as an excuse for absenting himself from the festivities. But he had yet to learn how very determined Doris Marie could be.

"Oh," she replied airily, "the dances of today are so easy that an aged and feeble-minded man with a club foot could do them after a little practice. I simply won't believe that they are beyond you."

And now he was in a corner of the room, and Doris Marie had taken his hand and drawn it about her slender little waist, and the music had started, and he was being dragged around, back and forth, up and down the room, jiggety—jig—jiggety—jig—spin three times around—he, Boyd Hunter! A deacon in the church—a man who had denounced dancing in no uncertain terms, and who had believed all he had said against it. He caught some of the boys exchanging glances, grinning gleefully, signalling Doris Marie that she had their sympathy. That put him on his mettle. Damn them, he'd show them that he could do whatever any other young fellow did. He'd dance, or die trying. He set his mind to the unwelcome task and was soon

dancing quite creditably. Not only that, but he had to admit that he was enjoying the exercise. His body was young and strong and supple and now lent itself easily to the guidance of Doris Marie. He wouldn't have admitted it, but he actually felt that he could dance all night and not feel weary. He also acknowledged to himself that it gave him a delightful thrill to hold the soft warm little body in his arms. For the first time since he had left the sanitarium he realized that he really was young.

Yes, he was young. Exercise was a joy. Dancing was fine exercise. And he had already decided against again becoming a deacon in the church. Probably he'd not be asked to take that position anyhow. He was too young. Young. But was he? The other young fellows were dancing as if they were thinking of nothing else. They were living in the present. One had only to study them to know that. And he? No, he wasn't doing that. His past—but he must not think of that now. He must dance.

If only he could train himself to think as the modern young person did—but did he really want to do that? Was it necessary? After all he was supposed to be some eight or ten years older than most of them; would that not give him the right to certain opinions supposed to be held only by the mature, and would he not be fairly safe from destructive criticism if he voiced those opinions? Perhaps he had been too apprehensive. Hadn't he been just a little cowardly as well? Why had he kept still while that irritating girl made all those absurd statements about his being her property? He must make her understand that he wouldn't tolerate any more of such talk. He had no intention of being linked with her in any sort of prematrimonial affair. The sooner he made her realize that the better. He stopped dancing, determined to act on that thought at once, and led Doris Marie to a cozy nook arranged for petting parties and supposed to be Japanese in style.

"Tired already?" asked Doris Marie in surprise.

"No," he replied, "I want to tell you something."

"All right, but put your arm behind me before you begin. You look cross enough to eat nails, and I don't want the bunch to think we are quarrelling so soon. Put your arm behind me, I say. There! Now if we've got to quarrel, let's get it over with."

"We are not quarrelling," he replied, sternly, "but you are to pay careful attention to what I tell you. Understand me, please. I am in earnest. Never again shall I stand quietly by while you are getting off all that outrageous stuff about our studying each other's characteristics with a view to—"

"Oh, that!" interrupted Doris Marie, giggling; "I saw that didn't set well; but don't worry, it won't happen again. The bunch understand, and they'll keep off the grass. They are all good sports."

"But I want it understood that there is absolutely no truth in what you have been telling them. I will not have our names linked together in any such way."

"You want me to make that announcement?"

"I insist upon it."

"You'd better think twice before doing that."

"If you don't make my position clear, I shall do so myself."

"You'd better think that over several times before doing it."

"Is that a threat?"

"It is a warning. I've been trying to do you a service. If I withdraw my friendship, and say what I think, and what you deserve, you won't have one friend among all the young people whose parents knew your father. You'll be left entirely alone, and more than that you'll be ridiculed until your life won't be worth living."

"Nonsense. You are talking like a spoiled child. What do you suppose I care for the opinion of a group of nincompoops such as you have gathered together here!" Boyd was asserting himself with a vengeance. He was talking exactly as he felt, and he did not realize how very peculiar it sounded coming

through the lips of a man of thirty. He was scolding like a narrow-minded despotic old man of seventy, and he had yet to learn that the youth of today takes no stock in the opinions of their elders.

"Listen, Boydicum," interrupted Doris Marie, with what she considered exemplary patience, and as she spoke she drew Boyd's arm more closely about her shoulders, and allowed her short curls to tickle his neck. "Listen closely for you are about to hear something that is spoken only for your good."

She giggled as she said this, recognizing its similarity to speeches her mother had made to her only a few years ago, but she considered it one mark of a true friend to let this young man understand exactly what his situation would be in case she abandoned him as hopeless. She could think of nothing more horrible than to be absolutely ignored by the young people who ruled her little corner of the world. Since babyhood her cry had been, "I must do this—I must do that—I must do as the others do or I'll be left out of everything," and her mother had heeded her cry and permitted many things that her commonsense deplored. Do anything—anything—rather than be ignored was the slogan of her age, and most parents repudiated their duties as parents and bowed before that slogan. Then they wondered why their children did not respect them, and failed to see that they were responsible for the Doris Marie style of young person. But Boyd had no clue to her point of view. He could not understand just how horrible was the fate Doris Marie saw in store for him unless he heeded her warning and allowed himself to be saved. The situation was very grave. She must adopt extreme measures. She'd have a very delightful time, later on, telling her friends how dramatic it had been. Had she known she was talking to a man seventy years old instead of to his son—but of course she didn't have a suspicion of that.

"Listen Boydicum; you must understand that we all know that your father was really quite a dreadful old man—"

"I have said that we would not discuss my father," interrupted Boyd, who was quivering with just rage, and nearly ready to explode.

"But we must, in order for you to understand. You are too much like your father—"

"Too much like my father!"

"Everyone is talking of the uncanny resemblance, and such talk isn't going to help you a little bit."

"I happen to know that my father was liked and respected—"

"Without doubt he told you so. He would. Perhaps he believed it himself. But let me tell you that he was the loneliest old man in the world. He was never invited anywhere, because he was never wanted. Respected? Yes, in a way. There wasn't much against him, I guess, but no one wanted him around. You'd die if you had to live as he did. Anyone would, unless his veins were filled with vinegar. Now hold on—" as Boyd tried to withdraw his arm and leave her— "you'd better listen. You won't have a friend in our set if I go back on you."

Boyd's seventy-year-old brain admitted that he'd be wise to control his temper and listen. He knew he had never made warm friends, but he did not know the reason. In order for him to play his part properly, Boyd Hunter, Jr. must know why Boyd Hunter, Sr. was considered the loneliest man in the world—must know how this jazzy, painted, shallow-pated girl had learned the bitter, carefully guarded secret of the old man who was himself. She was right in thinking that he did not want to go back to that loneliness. He longed for friendship.

"Is it the custom of this country," he asked stiffly, "for young people to criticize their parents, or listen to criticisms of them?"

"Sure, if they deserve it. Parents are only people."

"You would allow anyone to criticize yours?"

"Why not? They're not above criticism. In this day, no one wants to be like his parents in any way whatsoever. Parents

are all back numbers. They've been found out. They preached to their children against the very thing they were doing themselves. They don't face the truth about anything. And of all the parents of this day and generation your old father was one of the most despicable. Now don't get your back up. You must know I speak the truth. Anyhow, it is just as well for you to know what everyone is thinking. He let his wife leave his home when she was with child, and could not be held responsible for anything she did or said—and he paid no attention to his son until he was about to die and had no one else to carry on his business. He was a selfish old beast all his life. He was deacon in the church for many years because he liked to carry the contribution box and see his friends put in money. There is no record of any good cause that he ever helped. He broke no laws, because it wouldn't have interested him to do so, and there would have been nothing in it for him. He was considered a good citizen simply because he had never been tempted to be anything else—not because he believed it his duty to be a good citizen."

"Stop it," commanded Boyd, who was white to the lips. "I won't listen to such lies. Where did you get all your slanderous accusations?"

"We all heard what your father's old friends said when they heard that he couldn't live, and afterward, when we knew that you were coming to take his place. We youngsters asked questions. We wanted to know what we might expect of you. We found a few old people who had known your mother. They liked her—had only pleasant things to say of her—and we hoped you might be like her. You can imagine how we felt when we saw you—the image of your tight-lipped, stingy, narrow-minded, puritanical, dried-up old dad. Now, Boydicum, you may believe me when I say that the only thing that can save you is to make yourself as different from him in every respect as you possibly can."

"And if I don't?" asked Boyd, with cold fury.

"If you don't you'll be ostracized. We young people will see to that. Your father's old acquaintances will soon be convinced that you are not worth a quarrel with us youngsters. They bear your father's memory in no great respect, and there is nothing so attractive about you as to induce them to take up the cudgels in your behalf."

"And now that I've heard your ultimatum, may I be permitted to retire?"

"You may do exactly as you damn please. I shall give you time to think this over, because I realize that you are a poor half-baked cub who knows nothing whatever about modern social conditions. So, I shall not mention this conversation, or our tottering friendship, until you do. The moment you announce that you are opposed to my views, I shall begin my campaign. And I shall have the sensation of my young life—a mental battle with an honest-to-bust barbarian."

Boyd actually gasped like a fish out of water when he heard that. Anger is a mild term for the sensation he experienced. He was too furious for words. Doris Marie stared at him incredulously for a moment, but no matter how great her astonishment she was never at a loss for words.

"For the love of Pete!" she exclaimed—"Jekyll and Hyde."

"What do you mean by that?" There was an undertone of fear in the almost whispering voice that asked the question.

"Why, the most curious change came over your face—and into your eyes. It was like a dark cloud passing over your face, Boydicum, and it made you look exactly like your father, only older. Actually, for the moment you looked eighty years old."

"I guess I do have a beastly temper," murmured Boyd, contritely.

"Well, if temper makes you look like that, you'd better stamp on it. I'm not so sure that I want to play around with you after all."

Boyd was worried, now. Doris Marie had thrown off his encircling arm, and when he sought to replace it, she left her seat quite abruptly.

A young man, seeing Doris Marie standing, now claimed her for the next dance.

"Yes, Billy," she said, pleasantly, "I had not forgotten!" then to Boyd, "Boydicum, I want you to meet Billy Sands. He's the nicest kid in our bunch. Billy, this is my latest victim, Mr. Boyd Hunter. You nearly caught us quarreling, but it wasn't serious." They floated out on to the dance floor, and Boyd slowly made his way through the throng towards the door that led to the stair case. He would go to his room. He wanted to be alone where he could think this thing out. So he looked old when angry! He had perhaps alienated the only girl who had shown herself willing to help him live under the new and trying social conditions that had been forced upon him. He had made a bad beginning. Boyd had barely reached the door when he met his hostess coming in with her arm about the waist of a young woman who had evidently just arrived.

"Oh, Mr. Hunter," she exclaimed, "how very fortunate! I want to introduce you to my baby sister, who has come quite unexpectedly to spend a few weeks with us. This is Mr. Boyd Hunter, dear, of whom I have been telling you. My sister, Miss Clara Wilton. You two can finish this dance together, and then, Boyd, you'll please let Doris Marie know of her aunt Clara's arrival."

And so instead of getting away by himself where he could think, Boyd Hunter found himself dancing with a charming girl of thirty-five years, who was as different from the other girls in the room as could possibly be imagined.

It is not a tribute to a man's good judgment in the matter of selecting a wife that a girl like Clara Wilton should reach the age of thirty-five years without being married at least once; but it is a common occurrence. Few men recognize the born wife and mother and homemaker and companion when they

see her outside the environment which should be hers. They are more apt to be attracted by color and noise and mental and moral jazz. Clara Wilton longed for a home and a husband, but she didn't know how to go to work to make her dreams come true. She had never let anyone know she would have liked attention. She could no more have solicited the attention of any man than she could have said leg when limb was obviously the more lady-like word to use. It was not that she would have hesitated to use any word that was required, but she saw no reason to drag in anything that was coarse when she had a choice. She had a fine mind, well stored. She talked intelligently on the topics of the day, but she did not swear. She had not bobbed her beautiful hair because she did not believe bobbed hair would be becoming. She did not wear her gowns extremely short because she considered such a style absolutely nasty. For the same reason, she did not wear her gowns so low that most of her body was exposed. And she could not understand why anyone should deliberately tie themselves to a habit so useless and expensive and dirty as the use of tobacco. While she never judged her niece's friends openly, she often wondered how they could be as pleased with themselves as they were.

Clara Wilton was a decided blonde, with an abundance of beautiful tawny hair, a fine pink skin, good honest blue eyes and firm lips with dimples at the corners to soften their austerity. As a child she had been too thin for beauty; but she had taken on flesh as she grew older and was now just plump enough to be at her prettiest. Boyd Hunter liked her at once, and was glad of the opportunity to show her some attention. He found her very restful after Doris Marie, and he thought it might be well for girls like Doris Marie and her friends to be shown that sensible men preferred the nice modest old fashioned girls. And so he bestowed upon Clara his most attractive smile as he boyishly called her attention to his deficiencies as a dancer; but Clara danced beautifully and easily and had no difficulty in guiding him through the crowd. He enjoyed that

dance immensely. So did Clara. They talked as they danced, and they also enjoyed that. Doris Marie, who had seen them dancing together and was not pleased, kept away from them, making no effort to conceal her displeasure, but they did not notice her at all. They sat together talking easily while they awaited her arrival. Finally Clara looked about the room, and caught her eye. "Doris Marie is not making haste to greet me," she said.

"Shall I take you to her?" asked Boyd, suddenly remembering that he had been entrusted by his hostess with some such duty. But Clara decided that they need not go in search of her. "She has her other guests," she said with a smile, "and I am at best an old story. If she cares to welcome me she'll come where I am."

Doris Marie was furious. She could no longer control herself, and rushed from the room in search of her mother. It was imperative that her mother should realize how angry she was. What right had her aunt to butt in like that when she had not been invited, she demanded. Her mother reminded her that Clara had not known that she was giving a party. She had come to make a little visit as she did quite frequently and as she had every right to do. Wasn't a mother allowed to see her own sister under her own roof?

"You might have kept her in your own room," retorted Doris Marie.

"I saw no reason why she should not enjoy the dancing. She loves to dance as well as you do, and she doesn't often have so good an opportunity."

"Opportunity! Huh! You know well enough what I mean. She is just a mean old cradle-snatcher—that's exactly what she is." And Doris Marie flounced away, leaving her mother entirely enlightened as to the cause of her grievance.

"Cradle snatcher!" the mother smiled, "and Clara can't be more than five years older than Boyd. A difference of five years really amounts to nothing because Clara is not one to

grow old very fast. It would be a good match for her, and a bad match for Doris Marie, and Boyd is much more likely to choose Clara than Doris Marie. I hope it comes off. Clara will never have a better opportunity, and Doris Marie can marry any one of a dozen men nearer her own age."

CHAPTER VIII.

As Boyd seated himself at the beautifully appointed breakfast table, on the morning following the New Year party, he glanced somewhat apologetically at his hostess. He looked very much like a small boy apprehensive of undeserved rebuke. Mrs. Palmer had constituted herself a sort of kindly guardian—put it over in less than thirty-six hours—and made him feel under obligations to her. The situation puzzled him. His social training had been neglected and he couldn't guess what was expected of him. He did not wish to appear ungrateful for the friendly interest his hostess had accorded him, but just the same he meant to free himself from her domination. He intended to take the first opportunity to make an announcement that he knew she would not like, and he was quite determined that neither argument nor persuasion should cause him to change his plans. She had told him she meant to keep him as her guest for at least a week, and she was one of those dominating hostesses whose guests were always wary about asserting their own individuality. Notwithstanding his fear of her displeasure, Boyd was going to his own home. He was going immediately after breakfast. He had already packed his suitcase and ordered a taxi. He hoped the taxi would arrive at an opportune moment—just before his hostess could offer any objections to his going that he would find difficult to set aside. He knew very well that his presence in her home was so particularly desired because he was a bachelor and eligible, and she had two unmarried girls on her hands. He did not flatter himself that she would insist upon entertaining him for any other reason. It was her business as a society matron to see to it that no other match-making matron should get her claws into him before she had him securely tied and labelled.

But the nature of Mrs. Palmer's protest surprised him.

"Surely," she said, looking shocked and incredulous, "you are not thinking of living in that horrible old house. Inspect it, of course, dear boy; that is your duty—but as for living in it, why, Boyd, you couldn't possibly do that."

"I don't see why not," replied Boyd with an acidity in his voice that he had not intended. He was naturally indignant. He had lived in that house a great many years. He had been away from it only a year. No one could know more about it than he did himself—and he loved it; but circumstances prevented him from defending it as he would have liked to do. Naturally it was somewhat difficult to be civil to anyone who would dare speak of it as a horrible old house.

"You'll understand what I mean," said Mrs. Palmer softly, "when you have seen the place." She had noticed that he was hurt because she had characterized his father's house as horrible—but as his guardian and prospective relative—either as mother-in-law or sister-in-law, she must see that he did himself properly.

"My house may be as horrible as you seem to think," replied Boyd coldly, "but my father lived there—"

"He would," interrupted his hostess; "that fact is illuminating. It is exactly the sort of house in which he would live. He lived there many years after he had become rich enough to afford something better. You will understand, when you see that place, what I do not feel quite at liberty to say—but I will say this—that old house should tell you just how your father was rated as a citizen. All the best people in his old corner of the town are hoping for something more progressive from you."

"All the same," replied Boyd stubbornly, "I feel that it will seem like home to me."

"Castles in the air," rejoined his hostess, archly; "you are doomed to disappointment."

"Perhaps; but I'll try it out."

"Why not take a comfortable suite of rooms in an apartment for bachelors," suggested Mr. Palmer. "I know a number of fine young men who find these suites delightful. Let me take you to see one—I'll introduce you to some young fellows—"

"Please—not at present," interposed poor Boyd. "I've been thinking of that old house—my father's old home—you see he told me all about it. I know its drawbacks—yet I feel that I'd rather live there than anywhere else."

"But you are too young to keep up an establishment like that," urged Mrs. Palmer, "even if the house were in good condition. There are so many difficulties—why tie yourself up?—and the servant problem is simply appalling. Think of the domestic situation—you know nothing of conditions here. It is bad enough when there is a woman at the head of things—but a young man—alone—why, you must understand that no respectable housekeeper would care to do for you, unless she were too old to do anything else."

"In England," replied Boyd, "young men employ either Japanese or Chinese to do for them. I think I might manage that way very nicely. Anyhow," with a grim determination that he hoped sounded like boisterous gaiety, "I mean to make a try at it. If I find it unsatisfactory I don't have to stay. I can always close the house again and try the bachelor apartments."

"That is true," agreed Mrs. Palmer, adding as if it were an afterthought, "or you can marry. After all, that is the wisest way for any young man who is able to keep up a home, and has a longing for domesticity."

"Perhaps," replied Boyd, dubiously. "Marriage is all right, I suppose, when it succeeds; but when it doesn't one might as well live in hell."

This speech surprised the speaker even more than it did his audience. He certainly had not meant to say anything of the sort; but a sudden recollection of his silent old house where he had spent so many lonely hours—and a fugitive thought of the few brief months when his wife had made a real home

of it, and then gone away and left him alone—these two memory pictures had served to fill him with a rebellion against marriage that drove the words from his lips with a fury that was appalling. For a moment he feared for his secret. He had spoken as one entirely too well informed. But his hearers believed that they understood, and they were sorry for him. Of course he was thinking of the trouble that had separated his parents, and they considered it only natural that he should appear cynical. They were almost sorry they had spoken—but not quite, because they did wish he would take them into his confidence—tell them just what had happened, and which parent had his sympathy, and how his mother had managed to live, and if she had ever been sorry she had run away, and whether his father had ever tried to get her to return to him, or ever contributed to her support. It did seem to them that there was too much romance in the situation to be wasted when an appreciative audience so longed for it.

“There are happy marriages, you know, dear boy,” suggested Mrs. Palmer in her most dulcet tones. “And even when a marriage is only half-way ideal, it is far, far happier than to be alone in the world.”

“The safest way, to my notion, is to remain unmarried,” replied Boyd curtly.

“It certainly is for some people,” chimed in a cool young voice from the doorway, and Doris Marie entered the room. Only six words, yet she had managed to convey her belief that one Boyd Hunter was beneath the notice of any self-respecting girl. “And so you’re leaving us,” she added, cheerfully, as if she were more than reconciled to his departure, and in something of a hurry to speed the parting guest. “How quaintly you’ll fit into your queer old father’s house! Of course you want to try it out as soon as you can.” This was added to warn her doting parents that the young man’s room had become much more desirable than his company. She put it over, too, leaving no doubt either in the minds of her parents or

that of their guest that a thorny rod was in pickle for him. Before he could make any reply, she exclaimed with pretty enthusiasm as she glanced out the window, "why, there's your taxi, now. How fortunate that it didn't delay your departure!"

Boyd thanked his host and hostess for what they had tried to do for him, accorded Doris Marie an exceedingly curt and indifferent nod of farewell, and left an unnecessarily pleasant and appreciative message with Mrs. Palmer for her charming sister. One might have thought he was really disappointed because Clara had not come down to breakfast. The servant brought his grips, and he took his departure as gracefully as he could, knowing that a pair of mocking brown eyes were curiously studying his feet, as if she found them amusing. What in thunder was wrong with them! How could a fellow walk naturally when he was being stared at like that!

Boyd breathed a sigh of relief as he settled himself in his taxi. Now he could be alone. Now he could think. Now he would have time to review his plan, study its defects so far as they had been revealed to him, and plan his next moves. He had believed that his plan had been perfect in every detail, but in less than forty-eight hours he had become convinced that his fences required mending all along the line. He could see, now, that many questions would be asked that he could not answer, and be safe. He had determined, as part of his plan, to hold himself so aloof, and with such dignity, that he would speedily discourage the asking of personal questions. But he had not reckoned on the young people of this generation to which he was supposed to belong—or to the generation just behind his. They were no respecters of persons. They called unpardonable curiosity being honest and aboveboard, and they were interested in him, therefore they would give him no peace. Questions would be asked. His only safe course lay in silence—but silence to the young people he had met would act like the waving of a red rag before the eyes of a bull. It would only serve to stimulate their curiosity. They would

scent a mystery. "How perfectly gorgeous!" he could hear them exclaim, "now we can all become honest-to-God detectives." He would be dissected, metaphorically speaking, and his pieces would be fed to the ravens, and the young people would have a perfectly spiffy time at his expense.

"Well," he said aloud, after thinking it all out—"I won't answer questions. In silence lies safety. They may guess what they like—they may say what they please—but if I keep still my enemies will have no clew to my past which they can use for my undoing."

Boyd secured the services of a capable Japanese, without undue delay, and paid him twice as much as he had ever paid for the help who had cared for his home in the good old days before his regeneration. The old woman and her husband, whom he had employed for many years were still available. He might engage them. His heart hungered for their presence in his home—for they knew so well how to make him comfortable—but he quickly decided that it wouldn't be safe to have them in his home. They knew his habits too well—his slightest gesture had always brought a prompt response—he'd be in danger of falling back into his old ways, and they would become suspicious, where a stranger would be unobserving. No, he must forego the pleasure of being ministered to by them. He hated foreigners, but, after all, it was more in line with modern ideas for a young bachelor to employ Japanese help. He'd have to do it. He had been forced into a generation where he did not belong, and he'd gain nothing and might lose much by ignoring all the customs that men of his apparent age considered of importance. His new servant bore a very romantic Japanese name, but Boyd called him George—which is exactly what the seventy-year-old Boyd would have done. Any dark-skinned servitor who waited upon him must be named George, and this Japanese George he had employed

soon had his home running as smoothly as any home in the city.

Boyd was home again. He had spent his first night in his old room, and he awoke feeling as if he had never left it. He was happy. Then he chanced to raise his head from his pillows, and caught a glimpse of his reflection in the mirror—a young man with a shock of curly red hair! And today he was to make his first appearance in his office—his first in a long year—and he had to act as if he had never been in the place before. He'd have to allow himself to be shown where to find things—which desk had been his father's—to be introduced to employees he himself had hired and trained. He'd have to be introduced to Stafford—his stenographer, who was also his private secretary—Stafford who had been with him for a great many years, and who knew him better than anyone else had ever known him. Stafford who was the most observing man he knew. Would he guess? What would happen if he should? He couldn't believe that Stafford would betray him—yet he did not want him to guess the truth. Should he discharge Stafford—pick a quarrel? Say he preferred a younger man? Could he do that? Why, Stafford was really the best friend he had. And how could he manage without him? There was no one else in whom he could confide so fearlessly. He could never find another man to equal him. He liked Stafford so much that he simply couldn't hurt him. Besides, the man was no longer young; he'd given his best years to the business; if he were to be discharged, now, he'd never be able to secure another position. It would break the old fellow's heart. He couldn't do it. He simply could not do it. After all, there wasn't a chance in a hundred that the man would guess his secret. Such an unbelievable secret as it was! Why should he fear that anyone would guess the truth. He was safe. Why worry?

Boyd opened his office door and stood, shy and uncomfortable, just inside the room. Yes, everything was exactly as it

had always looked. He had hoped some changes might have been achieved—something that would make his inevitable and carefully considered questions sound more convincing. He had taken off his hat, quite unconsciously, and his hair looked rough, unruly, and full of vitality, while his pleasure in seeing his old office had filled his eyes with a happy, dancing light. Youth and vitality. That was the first thing that anyone, glancing at him, would notice.

Stafford, his back to the door, was fumbling with the safe—trying to get the lock, which seemed to have stuck, so that it would turn. He knew some one had entered, but gave his undivided attention to his task. That was his way—never to leave anything partially finished. Boyd smiled, understandingly, affectionately, as he recalled this trait in the man's character.

Finally Stafford turned and faced him. It was a tense moment for Boyd Hunter. The old man studied him for a long moment before he spoke, then, involuntarily, he breathed an exclamation of utter astonishment. "Good Lord," he said, and again, "Good Lord."

"Why call on the Lord," asked Boyd, trying to appear facetious. "Am I as formidable as all that?"

"I can remember you when you looked like that," stammered Stafford, "and I was a mere youngster when you—" he stopped, perplexed, anxious, ill-at-ease, then added, "when your father—Oh, my Lord!"

Boyd was terribly shaken by this introduction, but managed with difficulty to pull himself together.

"Are you," he began, then hesitated, wetting his dry lips, and hastened on, as boyishly impulsive as he could make it—"Of course you must be Mr. Stafford."

"Yes," muttered Stafford, as if dazed, "yes, I guess I am."

"Did I startle you—coming in without knocking?"

"You knocked me for a goal, all right. You've taken the

wind out of me. I'm dazed. I could have sworn you were your father. I still feel that you must be. Why, man, you can't be anyone else."

"Do I resemble my father as closely as all that?"

"Resemble him!" The words came like an explosion; "you are him. To the life. It's uncanny. You're exactly as I saw him forty years ago, when I first came into this office. I was twenty years old; he was thirty. I've worked for him ever since—and we've been friends."

"I know." Boyd was deeply touched. He longed to rush into the faithful old secretary's arms and tell him that his heart had not betrayed him, that his old friend had returned. But that wouldn't be safe. Even Stafford must not know the truth. But he might guess—what then? Boyd was convinced that in such an event there would be nothing for him but to leave the city—leave his beloved office and his shabby old home—Oh, he couldn't do that. He never wanted to go away again even for a day. Yet he knew that he'd never be able to face ridicule—that if his secret were to become known he should run away like a criminal.

"How do you know?" the old secretary was asking, eagerly.

"My—eh—my father told me." He pretended to be choking back what might pass for natural emotion—but he did hate to lie to Stafford. "My father talked of you incessantly during—eh—his last days."

"Why didn't you send for me? I'm sure he'd have been glad to talk things over with me before—he—died."

"He never mentioned sending for you or I—I should have done so—you must believe that. It didn't occur to me to take the initiative in that—or anything—I was just learning all I could."

"Of course. I can understand that. You couldn't really know what friends we'd been. But he—your father—knew the end was near—his letters to Palmer—I've seen them—I'm sure he must have wished to see me."

"Oh, he did—often—" interrupted Boyd eagerly. "But he thought you were needed here. It comforted him to know that you were here looking after things—holding down the job for me."

"I wonder if I shall ever be able to feel that I'm not talking to—to good old Boyd himself. Why your very voice is like his—the way you enunciate—everything. I can't believe that you are you—especially when I'm not looking at that red hair of yours and remembering that the Boyd I last saw was bald."

"Why try to keep us apart in your mind? I need a friend. I fancy I haven't the least idea how much I shall need a friend during the months ahead of me. Can't we just begin where you and my father left off?"

"I don't know. I can't promise. It is uncanny. It makes me uncomfortable. It—it actually makes me a—a little ill—"

"Your affection for my father—" murmured Boyd, who was feeling a little ill himself, "it—it was wonderful—I deeply appreciate—hadn't expected such devotion— Oh,—I believe I'm under the weather too—I simply can't talk about it any more."

"Yes—you need air. If you could go, now—" Stafford's voice was full of entreaty, "and let me get to work—"

"Yes, I'd best do that. I'll come in again tomorrow."

The two men shook hands—a long silent hand-clasp—and a look almost of fear crept into Stafford's eyes. "I swear," he said, "that you shake hands exactly as he did. Do you know, sir, there's nothing more revealing than a hand clasp?"

"I suppose there isn't." faltered Boyd, adding with a poor attempt at a smile, "really I've never thought much about that."

Then, somehow, he managed to get out of the room. His longed-for day at his loved office desk had terminated. He had planned to put in eight happy hours, and he had stayed less than one hour. It had been a far more difficult trial than he had anticipated, and he was glad to get away. Stafford had not been fooled. He had known. The only redeeming feature of that

interview was that Stafford did not realize how right he had been. Boyd dared hope that the worst was over—that Stafford would accept him, now—become accustomed to him—perhaps learn to like him so well, as he was, that he'd finally forget him as he had been. But it would take time. Stafford had a one-track mind. He must curb his own impatience in deference to that one-track mind. He would not try to hasten matters. He would not force his presence on Stafford, but would take possession of his old desk gradually—staying a little longer in the office each day. He felt that he'd do almost anything rather than discharge the man who loved him so unselfishly—so much more than anyone else he knew. His one true friend.

But what was he to do with the spare time that this change in his plans forced upon him? What did other young men do? He wished he had joined some good club where he could now take refuge as his father's son, and study the younger men with some of whom he must try to become fairly intimate—just enough to avoid criticism. He had never cared for games; should he try to become interested now? And he supposed it really would be wise to pay some attention to girls. A young man who ignored girls—as he would prefer to do, would surely invite criticism. How he wished he might take up his life where he had left off one year ago, and have no reason to care a picayune what anyone said about him. Girls. He might try to talk to some girl over the phone, as he'd often heard the boys in his office doing. But who? Certainly not Doris Marie, or Joe-Anne; but there was Clara Wilton—a nice girl—a fellow could feel fairly comfortable with her. He might ask her to go to lunch somewhere—yes, that is what he'd do, and he'd do it that very day.

A car had drawn up to the curb close to him, and its horn honked too close to his ear to be ignored. He glanced up to see Doris Marie regarding him with her most provoking smile.

“Morning, Grandpa,” she said, genially, “want a ride?”

CHAPTER IX.

His first impulse was to refuse her invitation in a manner not to be misunderstood. He had no wish to take a ride with Doris Marie. He had neither forgotten nor forgiven her insolence of the previous morning, when he had terminated his visit at the home of her parents—an insolence that a man of his apparent age would undoubtedly have found intriguing, but which in his estimation was nothing more nor less than the detestable impudence of an ill-bred youngster aimed at a man old enough to be her father. But he told himself quickly that her manners were characteristic of the youth of today—and that as he was supposed to be young, he must accustom himself to his environment; the manners of today would not be changed to please him, and he must have companionship. His old friends would be no more interested in him than in any other young fellow. This was a nice day for a ride—and he knew of no better way in which to get rid of the long hours he must spend away from his office. He climbed into the automobile and seated himself beside Doris Marie, and at that moment Clara Wilton passed—within six feet of the car. Doris Marie waved at her in an abstracted sort of way that was patently the most outrageous camouflage—as if she saw her and yet her appearance made no impression on a mind very much engaged—that was what the careless wave of the hand seemed to signify.

“Isn’t she coming with us?” demanded Boyd, who was already repenting having so quickly forgotten his intention to invite Miss Wilton to take lunch with him.

“Absolutely not,” replied Doris Marie decisively but cheerfully, giving most of her attention to her brakes, however.

“Miss Wilton has a very restful personality,” said Boyd, significantly, but without tact.

"You are not in need of a rest cure," retorted Doris Marie, shortly, and now gave her undivided attention to the problem of driving her car through one of the most congested streets in the world, and breaking as many laws as possible without getting arrested.

Boyd made no response to her retort. There was really nothing to be said. He had made an ass of himself by his inane remark, and she had snubbed him as he deserved. He watched the girl curiously, wondering how she could manage the big car so competently with such tiny hands. She was a little thing—too thin to be really beautiful in his eyes—too much of a live wire to be a comfortable companion for anyone, yet interesting enough to be worth studying. It occurred to him that it might be amusing and perhaps profitable to study her, if one were not obliged to see too much of her. He could believe that she would certainly help him to get in tune with his environment, if only he didn't allow her to get on his nerves—, and why should he allow that? A mere child, really. Why had he taken her so seriously that he lost his temper? He suddenly thought of her genial invitation to take this drive—compared it with the crispness of her attitude when he left her father's home, and wondered about the unexpected change; were all modern girls like that—an enemy one minute, a friend the next? The young people of his day had not been like Doris Marie, thank God. He recalled a saying of his little-boy days, "Doris was mad and I was glad, and now she is good and I'm not sad." Well, it was satisfactory to realize that he had done nothing towards inducing her more genial frame of mind. He hadn't coaxed her to treat him decently. She'd learn, if she saw much of him, that her tempers were of no more importance to him than the antics of a kitten.

For a long time they rode without speaking. Boyd was enjoying it. The steady purr of the engine was restful. It was delightful not to be obliged to make conversation with a silly girl. His mind had buried its worry for the moment. Even his

office was forgotten. If only his companion would persist in her delightful silence, he could be really happy. It was a perfect day for the time of year, clear, sunshiny, crisp and cold, but the enclosed and heated car was exceedingly comfortable. No pleasanter way of getting rid of idle hours could be imagined. He decided that he'd be more sociable than he had been since his return. He'd excuse his apparent inattention to reciprocal obligations on the ground that he had been giving his best efforts to becoming acquainted with, reestablishing, his business. He'd make new acquaintances now—he promised himself—he'd go about quite a bit, and try to find some really interesting friends among young people. Surely he could find a friend or two who would be interested in what interested him. There must be some who were not jazzy like those he had met at the New Year party. He preferred men friends—but there should be a girl or two—sensible, worth-while girls. There must be a few such girls left in the world. There was Clara Wilton for instance—and she had told him that Joe-Anne was really interesting when one became well acquainted with her.

“One doesn't accept all of Joe-Anne's curious notions,” she had told him; “but one always wants to be among those present when she gets started to telling what she thinks she thinks.”

He proceeded now to recall Clara with considerable definiteness—to consider her more seriously than he had at all. He had enjoyed talking with her; why not see her frequently? He decided that he'd like to invite her out occasionally—he was quite sure she would accept—it would be much more satisfactory to ask some nice sensible girl like Clara Wilton to go with him, than to be annexed by some outrageous young flapper—as Doris Marie had just annexed him for this ride. Clara was a very sensible young lady. She would be easy to entertain, and she was not at all bad to look at. Of course he couldn't devote himself exclusively to her without asking her to marry him. He understood that. Mrs. Palmer would be watching him—

would finally ask his intentions—he knew how women managed such affairs! And he was determined that he would not be drawn into anything of the sort. He wouldn't marry the best woman that ever lived. That is, if he could help himself. But could he? He realized that he was out of things—had never had social experience—would not be absolutely sure how to protect himself—he might get trapped! He might. Mrs. Palmer knew all the tricks. She didn't want an old-maid sister on her hands forever. Mrs. Palmer might trap him. Well, if that happened—well—a girl of thirty-five was not so very much too young for a man of seventy.

A man of seventy. A man of seventy who passed as a man of thirty—yet who couldn't forget that he was seventy—who never would forget; he knew, now, because that fact had been driven home with cruel relentlessness by the uncanny change in his appearance. Before he had been made over, so to speak, he had never wasted time thinking how old he was. He didn't care. He had always said that a man was no older than he felt. Wasn't he? Was that opinion based on the attitude of the mind or the body? Certainly his old mind was constantly jeering at his young body—a body that he secretly admired, although it troubled him, because it constantly reminded him that he had passed his seventieth birthday, and was living a life of deceit, almost sinful in a man who had been a deacon in his church for so many years.

Boyd suddenly awoke from his reverie. He had somehow taken it for granted that he and Doris Marie were started for the country, but the car was being drawn up before a rather shabby row of houses in a rather shabby quarter of the city.

"We get out here," announced Doris Marie, briskly. "This is where we eat."

"I don't see any cafe."

"A friend of mine has a studio in this building. We'll lunch in the studio."

They had alighted and were going up the short flight of steps to the rather ornate, old-fashioned front door.

"Does she know you are bringing a guest?"

"She is a he," replied Doris Marie, "and he doesn't care how many friends I bring. We always pay our share—divide expenses pro-rata, you know."

They were mounting what seemed like innumerable flights of stairs. The studio was on the top floor, and the building had no elevator. Boyd looked up the staircases, as they appeared before him, with something of dismay until he discovered that they didn't tire him at all. His breath came evenly—his heart gave him no anxiety—two steps at a time. That was just what his muscles had been crying out for. He was not taking sufficient exercise for a young man—he ought to go in for mountain climbing—

"Damn! he isn't at home." Doris Marie had tried to open the door, and was now on her knees fumbling under the door mat. "Here it is," she announced, producing a key.

"Why do we break in," asked Boyd; "there are other places to eat."

"No other place where I want to eat," replied Doris Marie, crisply. "This is all right. Don't worry, Grandpa." She opened a door and ushered him into the studio. He wandered, something like a lost dog, to a convenient chair.

"Hold on, there, Grandpa, you can't sit down. Not yet. We've no time to lose. You've got to help get luncheon." As she spoke, she had found a large bath towel, which she was now pinning around him for an apron. She found another for herself. She peered into various hiding places, and drew out material for the lunch. She communicated some of her enthusiasm to him. As a little boy he had enjoyed picnics. This was like a picnic, except that it was held indoors. He wished they had been invited, however, and that their host were present.

"You peel the potatoes," Doris Marie directed, "then I'll

show you how to cut them into dice. I'm going to make potato stew. I'll bet a dollar you've never tasted such good potato stew as I make—absolutely spiffy. Um-m-um-m-!"

She set a small pan full of potatoes before him and gave him a potato knife. "Now get busy," she ordered—"make it snappy. I put in one or two more potatoes than we'll eat so there'll be some of the stew left over for Dicky."

"Is this Dicky's studio?"

"Uh-huh. His baptismal name is Richard Graham."

"But what will he think—" Boyd snapped the question off in the middle. He had intended adding, "when he finds us here unchaperoned," but it suddenly occurred to him that such a question would give her another opportunity to call him grandpa, and he felt as if he couldn't hear that many more times without boxing her ears. But Doris Marie had not heard any part of his question.

"I boil the potatoes," she told him in a house-wifely manner, as amusing as it was unexpected, "in the tiniest bit of water. It must be all boiled away when the potatoes are done; then I add cream and butter and pepper and salt—and there they are—delicious, and none of their vitamins have been lost. I'll have scrambled eggs to go with them, and hot muffins and coffee. I can make the muffins while you are getting the potatoes ready. Guess I'll make a few cup cakes, since we'll have to heat the oven for the muffins, and we'll open a can of apricots. Do hurry, because you'll have to set the table."

"I'm not very handy at this sort of thing," protested Boyd, who was now looking quite as uncomfortable as he felt. He was thinking how vexed he'd be if anyone broke into his house, and used his things as he was helping use those of his absent host, and he was worried for fear the absent host would arrive and find Doris Marie and himself there, unchaperoned. He felt that it really wasn't a nice situation.

"You'll learn," was the cheerful response, "I'm going to

give you every opportunity to learn much that you need to know."

"Is this sort of thing customary?" he cautiously inquired.

"Coming here to lunch, do you mean?"

"Uninvited—and—and" he was going to say unchaperoned, but wisely decided against that.

"I do it whenever I feel like it," replied Doris Marie. "Dicky and I were almost engaged not so very long ago. Now he pals with Joe-Anne."

"Well," thought Boyd, "I may as well stop worrying. If Doris Marie gets talked about, it won't be my fault. I didn't bring her here, and I don't know how to get her away." Having thought this, he dismissed his anxiety on that score, and proceeded to make himself at home. And then he really had a fine time. Doris Marie proved herself an excellent cook, and he did justice to the meal she provided. She was enjoying herself so much that she forgot to call him grandpa, and while they ate she made herself so agreeable that she astonished him. He learned that she had actually read some good books, and could make curiously illuminating comparisons between them and the more modern literature that he did not consider worth reading.

When the meal was finished Doris Marie decided not to wash the dishes immediately. "Let's rest," she suggested, "and perhaps Dicky will get here before everything is spoiled, and then he can help with the dishes."

She made Boyd sit in a big easy chair, then lighted her cigarette and calmly seated herself in his lap.

"Want a whiff?" she asked, offering her cigarette to Boyd.

"I do not," he replied with emphasis. He was holding himself very stiff and straight. He did not like the situation at all. Suppose Dicky did come in—unannounced—

"No use asking you if you object to my smoking," said Doris Marie, "because it is evident that you do—and I have no intention of giving up my smoke. Perhaps after you have

smelled two or three hundred of my cigarettes, you'll begin to long to try one yourself."

"I think you'd better—eh—take another seat." Beads of perspiration were breaking out on his brow. He hated having her in his arms, but how could he compel her to get up?

"Why take another seat? I'm not very heavy—especially for a big, husky fellow like you."

"Suppose Dicky, as you call him, should come in?"

"Let him come. I've sat in his lap many times. He won't faint. You see, he and I had to decide, as I've already intimated, whether we'd be willing to marry each other, and that always calls for petting parties. We concluded that our temperaments were too much alike to make it safe for us to marry. We'd have quarrelled like cats. Both very temperamental, you know, which means ugly when we are crossed."

Even as she spoke, steps were heard coming along the hall. Boyd wriggled with horror, and tried to spill Doris Marie from his lap to the floor, but she threw her arms about his neck and held on. Her face was bright with mischief. She enjoyed his embarrassment.

"Hello, Dicky," she said, quite casually, as the owner of the apartment stood at the door, looking in, "come on in. You have company."

"So I see, you darned little devil," replied Dicky, grinning; "I suppose you didn't leave any grub for me?"

"Plenty of everything. A little cold, but better than you'd get if you cooked it yourself. Mr. Graham, let me introduce Boyd Hunter. He can't get up to acknowledge the introduction; but he'd like to. In him you see my latest experiment."

"Don't try to get up, Mr. Hunter," said Dicky; "I know you can't do it. D. M. sticks like a burr."

Doris Marie was busy exploring Boyd's pockets. She drew out a half dollar which she threw on the dining table. "That will pay for our luncheon," she said. "I make you a present of the labor I put into your share of it."

"Thanks. Do it often. You sure are some little cook, D.M. I'm sorry you and I couldn't have hit it off better than we did."

"I'm not. I'd have had to cook all your meals—and that would not have pleased me. You'll always be poor. Now Boydicum, here, is well off. He can support a wife as she should be supported."

"Is she going to marry you?" asked Dicky of Boyd, and he made it sound as if such an intention on her part would be a calamity to her victim.

"We've not decided yet," replied Doris Marie, blowing smoke into Boyd's ear. "I'd never marry any man for his money, but I'm praying that the man I choose will have money. Boydicum has some grave faults, but I'm hoping to have a lovely influence—" As she spoke she caught his hand firmly and drew his arm about her waist, then buried her head comfortably in his neck.

"Take my advice, Mr. Hunter," interrupted Dicky, with mock solemnity, "and choke that girl into insensibility, then make a run for it, and don't stop until you are half way round the world."

"You didn't seem to find such measures necessary,—I mean the hasty trip around the world." The two men looked at each other and grinned, and Boyd felt that he had found at least one young fellow with whom he could feel comparatively comfortable. He suddenly succeeded in pushing Doris Marie off his lap, then stood up to prevent her from getting back again, after which he ambled about the room to keep out of her way, pretending to be interested in a collection of elephants on the mantel.

"The hasty trip is what I should have been obliged to take if you hadn't come to town," replied Dicky with conviction. "Modern girls are as dangerous as hooch, more dangerous."

"Get out, Dicky! You know you're lying. You like us—you've no time for ladylike girls; you never look at them, and you know it."

The two young people quarrelled about that. They seemed to think they were having a fine time. They chattered of trifles; they gossiped; they mentioned some of their friends by name who had decided to live their own lives—calling it experimental marriage; they talked of companionate marriage, and the trials Sidney and Myrtle were having because of the God-awful narrowmindedness of the parents; they discussed sex as young people of Boyd's day would have discussed toothache; they declared that anyone was a fool to work if he could live by his wits. It was disgusting to Boyd, and also puzzling. He couldn't decide how much, if any, truth there was behind their nonsensical chatter, but he did know that he'd had enough of it. Why should he try to endure it? While they talked he edged toward the door, grabbed his hat and coat from the hat stand, and went out hastily, after remarking that he wouldn't interfere with their visit,—as if that could excuse his unceremonious departure. Doris Marie called to him to wait, but he hurried down all the flights of stairs, and when he had reached the outer door, he dashed around the corner and into a narrow alley where an automobile could never follow him. He told himself that he had had as much of Doris Marie as he could stand, and any decent man would do as he was doing—cut and run! He didn't care how angry she got, or what reprisals she might attempt.

But when he had had time to think it over, Boyd regretted his haste. He wasn't sure but he'd acted like a prim old maid. Perhaps he deserved to be called grandpa. Why had he felt so uncomfortable with a good looking girl in his arms? It didn't hurt him to hold Doris Marie. Why should he have objected when she was so determined to sit in his lap? He hadn't invited her to sit there. He couldn't be accused of flirting with a girl young enough to be his daughter. She couldn't possibly

claim that he was forcing his attentions upon her. He was in no real danger—and, come to think of it, neither was she. Perhaps the people of his day had made too much of such matters. Perhaps it was better and safer to do one's love-making in a crowd—at least, not to jump and run when caught at it, but just consider it as a matter of course. He didn't know. He didn't like silly demonstrations of affection—but perhaps he'd get used to holding girls on his lap—he might even come to like it when he'd had a great deal of experience. But now! well he would probably have to hear Doris Marie tell her friends how he had dumped her on the floor and run away—and she'd be sure to call him grandpa when she told that. What a good time she would have describing the episode—changing it where necessary to make it sufficiently dramatic to suit her fancy. He could hear her telling it. He could hear her audience roaring with laughter. She would call him grandpa. Grandpa! how he hated to be called that, and without doubt the other young people would follow the lead of Doris Marie. Damn the girl, he'd like to kill her. Grandpa! A dangerous nickname for him. It might so easily have been! He knew men of seventy who had grand-daughters old enough to be married. To be called grandpa made him uncomfortable because he felt that it was like giving the world a key to his secret.

CHAPTER X.

Joe-Anne had been summoned, by a frantic call over the phone, to a very important conference with Doris Marie—at least, she had been assured that it was so important as to be almost a case of life or death, and would Joe-Anne come a-running?

“I’d have gone to you, dear,” explained Doris Marie, a few minutes later, “if I weren’t fighting this beastly cold. I’ve simply got to be well enough for that dance.” She was in her own room, attired in a negligee that couldn’t possibly protect her from any sort of cold, and her feet were immersed in a small tub of hot water. “Thought I might as well take this opportunity to get rid of corns,” she said; “my party slippers give me a new one every time I put them on.”

“You never will wear civilized dancing shoes,” responded Joe-Anne, “and I can’t understand why not, when you’re so advanced along other lines.”

“It’s my darned ugly feet,” explained Doris Marie, frankly, if not grammatically. “I’d give ten years out of my life if I had pretty feet like yours. You can wear any kind of shoe and look all right; and take it from me, Joe-Anne,—no girl is going to stand very hard for any kind of reform that isn’t becoming.”

“Needn’t count me in on that statement,” replied Joe-Anne, grinning cheerfully. “I stand for comfort first, last and all the time, and my sternest efforts shall always be directed toward making the thing fashionable that I want to wear.”

“You crafty little devil,—you’re doing it, too,” admitted Doris Marie affectionately. “The way you got our bunch

going around bare-headed just after I'd bought my most becoming hat—"

"I look well in hats, too," interrupted Joe-Anne,—“and my new hat is as nifty as yours; but any hat is a nuisance—and I'm not the only one in the bunch who looks much more attractive with a scarf thrown over the head—and think how much easier it is than holding a hat in your lap where hats are taboo; also think how much easier it is to keep one's hair in curl. Besides, you can wear your hat—if you want to; there's no law against it.”

"Well, when no one else is doing it—and it is more comfortable to leave it at home—"

"For the same identical reason, boiled down and with proper fixings, you should adopt a comfortable dancing shoe, and stick to it through thick and thin—"

"No good," interrupted Doris Marie with conviction, "if it looked like a rag on a dog's paw; I wouldn't get one disciple. But I didn't ask you to come here to talk shoes; I need help and counsel—"

"Go away with you," scoffed Joe-Anne; "you may need help, but you have no use for advice. I know you. What's your latest plan?"

Then Doris Marie told her of the luncheon in Dicky Graham's studio, and how Boyd Hunter had run away, leaving her to go home alone.

"Rather clever of him," giggled Joe-Anne. "I wouldn't have believed he could do it. He's getting interesting."

"Not getting, but is," amended Doris Marie. "He is absolutely different from the spineless young males that we're obliged to pamper if we're to have any boy friends at all; but I can't afford to give him too much rope or he'll get away from me."

"Dorie Marie, do you really plan to marry that man?"

"I haven't quite decided, yet; but I really think that is what I'm going to do."

"Are you falling in love with him?"

"For Pete's sake, Joe-Anne, don't be mid-Victorian."

"Well, then, why? I shouldn't care to live under the same roof with him, day after day—"

"Why not?"

"I can't explain—but he doesn't seem to me to be quite normal. He makes me shiver as if his hands were cold and clammy—"

"But you know they are not, don't you?"

"Yes. I'm speaking figuratively. There's something about him that gives me the willies. I suppose my aura fights with his, and that is why I don't want him too close. I can't bear to dance with him."

"I don't believe you are in earnest. You are just working up some new occult stunt. But if you do mean it, then you won't mind helping me give my young man a jolt for the good of his soul."

"Let's hear the plan."

"You see, he's got to be punished for running away and leaving me—"

"I don't see why. You haven't any strings on him, yet—and he knew you could drive your car home—"

"He also knew he was leaving me in a position to be laughed at by Dicky Graham."

"Did Dicky laugh?"

"Did he! You ought to have heard him. Of course I didn't let him see that I minded—but you don't want a fellow you've been going with a long time to know that another fellow—your latest—is trying to ditch you. I was humiliated—and so Boyd Hunter has got to pay. As long as he lives he's never again going to do a thing like that."

"Why not let him go his way and you go yours? I wouldn't waste time on any man who had to be punished before he could be tamed."

"And for that very reason you'll never marry the man you'd like to marry. If I let Boyd Hunter go his own way, I'll be sorry, because he doesn't want to marry at all—and I'm thinking I may want to marry him. And I want to marry him because he doesn't have any of the vices that I have myself—such as smoking and drinking, you know—and I really respect him more than any man I've ever met. I respect him even when he says such insulting things about the modern girl—because I know that he is more than half right about it. It's like this, Joe-Anne; I don't believe in love, but I know I could never live with a man I didn't respect. I sure do respect Boyd Hunter."

"Then why try so hard to make him over?"

"I'm not trying to make him over—just trying to rub off the sharp corners—so the bunch won't laugh at him as they do."

"You believe they are criticizing a man who is better worth knowing than they are. Well, why not live up to your belief—why not make Boyd the fashion—get the others silly about him? That's what I'd do if I wanted him."

"Yes, I believe you'd find a way to do it; but I'm not like you. I don't want my man laughed at by anyone—not even by a monkey. He must be enough like the others we go with not to attract attention—and he must understand that he can't trifle with me and be happy."

"Honestly, Doris Marie, don't you think he might be happier if he had never seen you?"

"No, I don't. Boyd Hunter needs a home, and he is able to have one. He can give me what I want, and I can give him a home and a good social position—something he'd never on earth be able to get for himself—not with his inheritance and his lack of social training. If I were to shoot him into oblivion, for what he did to me—that is

exactly where he'd spend the remainder of his days—in oblivion—and you know it.”

“I don't know anything of the sort. Your Aunt Clara would pick him up and give him much more than you have to offer. You know that, too, Doris Marie—and you are more than half jealous of her already.”

“I think,” replied Doris Marie with cold fury, “that for one who professes to be my friend, you are going too far.”

“I am not,” said Joe-Anne, imperturbably—“and I am really your friend; no ‘professes to be’ about it. And I say you're likely to lose Boyd Hunter to your Aunt Clara if you drive him too hard. For that reason I am going to refuse to join you in your plan to punish him—and now I'll go home and give you time to think it over.”

Before the astonished Doris Marie could realize what was happening, Joe-Anne had left the room, and the house. And she did have time for thought, but her temper was still troubling her and she did not decide to give up her cherished idea of punishing Boyd Hunter, and thus bringing him to her feet.

A long weary week dragged itself into the past. It marked the period in Boyd Hunter's life when he acknowledged his loneliness. He had not been invited anywhere—nor had he succeeded in finding anyone at home when he had called. He who, in former years, had sneered at people who depended upon others for happiness, now admitted to himself that he was no longer self-sufficient. He felt homeless, hopeless and forlorn, and he wondered why he had ever thought life worth living. He was like a homesick little boy who wanted his mother. His condition appalled him, and he hadn't the remotest idea how to better it. He decided that he must be the loneliest man in the world, and he didn't know why. He realized that he had more to make life interesting than he had had two years before—yet at that time he had never thought of himself as the

loneliest man in the world. But then he had lived in his business, and now he could not do that. And when his business no longer absorbed him to the exclusion of everything else, he did not know how to find anything to take its place.

Boyd went to his office every day, just as he had planned, but instead of staying there and perhaps working far into the night, he remained only a short time. And he was afraid his life there would never again be as it had been. He longed, yet feared to spend the entire day there. He feared Stafford, and also feared its effect on himself. He found that his efforts to act as if he knew nothing of a routine he himself had inaugurated were exceedingly tiring—and he could never feel sure that Stafford was fooled by them. No matter how faithfully he tried to feign the manner of the novice in the business—he could never spend an hour in that office without doing something—betraying some knowledge—that was not appropriate to his pretensions. Something was sure to happen that would not have happened had he really been his own son, taking possession, learning the ropes.

Most of Boyd's associates marvelled at his surprising efficiency. They accepted him without question—said he sure was a chip off the old block—wondered how his father could have taught him so much in the comparatively short time they had had together—predicted that the business would jump ahead beyond belief when once he had gotten into his stride—and whispered that old Stafford would eventually be dismissed. He was too old-fashioned to suit a smart young fellow like the new boss.

Stafford was as unhappy as Boyd was lonely. He was puzzled, too. He couldn't understand why he should feel as he did towards the son of his old friend. Why should he

so dislike the uncommon similarity between the young man and his father? Why couldn't he be happy over the constant manifestations of a likeness so startling that it must have proven the relationship even had the son stepped into his father's office without any introduction, except that of his personality? He had been devoted to the father. Why should he resent it that every move the young man made reminded him of his old friend? He asked himself that question a dozen times a day—and he could not find an answer. He found himself constantly watching for something new to happen—something unexpected, and as unreasonable as it was reasonable—(that is how he phrased it)—and he never watched in vain. A turn of speech—the mispronunciation of some word—a movement of the hands—the way he walked across the room—the poise of his head when debating a question—the uncanny way he had of rushing to some pigeon-hole when deep in an important business matter, and pulling out a document the very existence of which he couldn't possibly have been aware. It was decidedly weird. It was enough to excite superstitious fear in any one except, of course, a hard-headed Scotchman like himself. And the views of the young fellow on the topics of the day! They were never coincident with those of his generation; he could be depended upon—if he said anything at all—to say exactly what his father would have said had he been living. It was actually as if the old man's spirit had taken possession of the young man's body. Stafford didn't believe in such things, of course—he hoped he still had a little sense left—but there was hypnotism. He'd read something about hypnotism. Could the old man have hypnotized his son and have willed him to—to—live over again the life of the father—something like that? Could that be done? In such a case could the young soul ever be released?

"What utter bosh," whispered poor old Stafford, bringing himself up with a frown. "If I can't shake off such crazy thoughts, I'll be going to an insane asylum." And he began to consider his position seriously. This thing was making him queer. How far would it go with him? Could he safely spend the remainder of his days in the office that he had once considered about the next thing to Heaven? It was beginning to seem rather more like purgatory—and for no reason that any sane man would accept. Ought he to get away—take a long rest?

"I'll have to resign," he told himself, with a groan. "If I can't control my feelings, I'll have to get out. And then what? When I've left this place—why I've spent most of my life right in this office—I can't leave. What could I do if I did leave? I'll never find another job; everybody'd say I was too old. I couldn't go on living with nothing to do. It would be the death of me. And I'm needed here. I really am. No one understands the business as I do—but I don't suppose that young fellow would think so. He couldn't know how much I mean to the business—he couldn't possibly—or, could he? Maybe he could. He's enough like his father—I'll bet he'd understand—the old man would never let me go—and Boyd is his father come to life again."

For the first time Stafford saw a reason to feel rather glad that Boyd was like his father. "Like as not he understands how I feel," he said; "maybe, seeing it was his father, he wouldn't mind my hating so to be reminded of the old man; maybe he'd be willing to give me time to get used to him—if I were to tell him how I feel about it."

But when Boyd came into the room and Stafford tried to tell him what he had planned to say, he couldn't do it. He couldn't find the words. It sounded too silly. Boyd would think he was going crazy. After all the young fellow was not to blame for being so like his father, and he couldn't make himself over if he wanted to. Stafford realized that

he had no right to object to the owner of the business coming to the office whenever he wished and remaining as long as he pleased.

"I've just got to get used to him," he said. "I've got to pull myself together and act like a man of sense instead of an hysterical old woman. I've no business to let him scare me."

The word was out. Stafford had not meant to admit it, but he had said it. Boyd scared him. There was something so unnatural about the young man that Stafford couldn't go about his work as usual when he was in the room. Worse yet, he didn't want the young man to go behind him—not for a second. He always felt impelled to turn about and face him. He felt that he must know where the young fellow was and what he was doing every minute he stayed in that room—as if he were someone not to be trusted.

Boyd understood much that the old man was feeling, and was helpless in the face of such unexpected and inexplicable worry. The only remedy he could think of was to give the old man more time to become used to him. And that left more dragging hours to be whiled away. He joined a class in the gymnasium. That helped. It gave his vigorous young muscles the exercise they needed, and he met one or two young men of his apparent age who, he hoped, might become his friends. At least, they might be a little friendly, if he could manage to do his part, and think as modernly as he looked. They did not belong to Doris Marie's circle of acquaintances, which was in his favor since she could not prejudice them against him, and they were interested in politics, and civic government, and the business outlook, and listened quite politely to his views. They didn't say much, but they were almost companionable and Boyd's starved heart clung to the hope that in time they would really like him. He hoped they would never meet Doris Marie—

Doris Marie. What was she thinking of him now? What would she do? Without doubt she was planning some punishment—but what **could** she do? If he kept away from her, as he was quite determined to do, how could she hurt him, as she had threatened? Perhaps he had acted like a fool—and of course she was angry—but what could she really do to him? Why should he give that jazzy girl a second thought? If only he knew how to make a few friends that he'd really like—but—God! how lonely he was!

The more Boyd thought of what had happened in that studio, the harder he found it to reconcile his actions with the Boyd Hunter he had always known,—poised, self-reliant, business-like, sensible, dependable—nothing hysterical in his make-up. Why had he become so panic-stricken? The situation Doris Marie had created was harder on a girl than it could be on a man. Why had he run away like a silly bumpkin? What did he imagine could possibly happen to him? Why couldn't he have kept his seat, and held her quietly and impersonally in his arms, as he would have held any other child who had climbed into his lap? He knew—though she did not—that the difference in their ages should have made that possible. But to dump her on the floor—and run like a scared puppy—leave her to drive home alone after having accepted her invitation to accompany her—what must she and Dicky have said about him when the door closed behind him! How they must have jeered! What a story they would make of it! Had they made it public yet? Boyd's ears burned as he pictured the scene when Doris Marie, surrounded by her satellites, told the story, and he pictured it constantly. He told himself over and over again that he didn't care what they thought if only they'd let him alone—keep away from him—never speak to him again. And all the while he knew that he did care what they thought. He had always feared ridicule—and Doris Marie was an adept when it came to

holding a foe up to the derision of her crowd. He must plan some way by which he might get even with her—for whatever she meant to do to him—but could he? He really had little hope of that because he knew he'd never understand her game. Down in his shrinking heart he knew that he'd have to pay for what that damned girl was sure to consider an insult.

He tried to forget her, but in vain. What would she do? How would she make him pay? If he could only guess that, he might forestall her. If only he had dependable knowledge of the modern girl—enough to give him a clue to her probable reaction—if only he had one friend in the city of New York to whom he could go for counsel! He thought of Clara Wilton—she would know. Without doubt she could help him. But she was the girl's aunt, and she had been ignored when she might have gone riding with them—and what would one say to a girl like that anyhow? Ask her to give him a clue to the probable reaction of the flapper whose chosen escort had publicly expressed his indifference to her, publicly advertised preference by refusing to enjoy a petting party, by unexpectedly and not gently dumping a pretty girl on the floor—and—and running away—like a frightened puppy? What would a girl like Clara Wilton reply to such a confession? Would she laugh and say Doris Marie was just trying to tease him? Was that what Doris Marie really was up to? He didn't believe that. She hadn't looked hilarious when he caught a glimpse of her face—just before he ran away. She was furious. There was no doubt of that. She hadn't expected to be dumped—thought she had him tamed—and she had fallen hard with one arm under her. Boyd remembered that she rubbed her hand, before picking herself up, and he also thought she was examining one of her fingers with some anxiety. He believed that Dicky ran to her assistance as he made good his escape. Perhaps she had

put her finger out of joint—or would it be said that he did that? It might have been pain, not anger, that distorted her countenance. In that case, his position would certainly not be enviable. He was due to receive punishment. What would Doris Marie do to him?

He was not kept long in suspense. One day, as he left his office to go over to the Buckingham Grill for his luncheon, he noticed two young fellows standing close to the door of the building. They nudged each other as he came out, and soon he realized that they were following him. But he paid little attention to that for the quick glance he had given them as he passed through the doorway told him that they were students. They were dressed as Indians—with ludicrously painted faces and a string of bright feathers hanging down their backs. They looked sheepish. They seemed to be accompanied by a bodyguard who directed their movements. Boyd believed they were being initiated into a new fraternity lately organized.

When Boyd entered the grill the boys followed—and of course they immediately attracted attention. Men smiled tolerantly. They recalled the nonsense of their own college days. Boyd smiled, also. The boys did look funny. He seated himself in his favorite corner where he could see all over the room, and the boys seated themselves at his table. He intimated that he'd prefer to have the table to himself, but they appeared not to hear. They were gazing with soulful eyes at a table across the room. Boyd looked that way—and saw Doris Marie. She was seated at a large table, and many of her more reckless friends were crowded about her. She was paying no attention to him. Boyd shivered. He had a premonition that a part of his punishment was at hand—but he couldn't imagine what it would be like. He started to leave his seat—thinking to go to

some other eating house, but the proprietor accosted him.

"We are so crowded today," he said apologetically—"but soon I'll be able to find you a seat to yourself—that small table over there—"

"This will do very nicely," replied Boyd stiffly. "Can you send a waiter at once? I'm in a hurry."

Suddenly one of the boys leaned toward his companion and sang in a loud voice that was easily heard above the hum of the restaurant life:

"If a girl sat on your knee,
Ah me! Oh, dear me!
If a girl sat on your knee
Would you dump that girl and flee?
Would you flee? Would you flee?"

He had a powerful baritone voice, and sufficient dramatic ability to appear as if he were asking a question of supreme importance to himself. When he ceased, there was a sound of clapping hands—here and there about the room. Doris Marie started the applause. It was silenced by a pleasing tenor voice raised in song. The other young man was replying, and the ferocity of his delivery was funny when contrasted with the sweetness of his voice. His enunciation, like that of his companion, left nothing to be desired.

"If a girl sat on my knee
Oh, gee! Believe me,
If a girl sat on my knee
I would dump that girl and flee
I would flee. I would flee."

A wild burst of applause and much hearty laughter swept over the room. Boyd had tried his best to look unconcerned but Doris Marie was staring at him with an attentiveness that drew other eyes in his direction. Her eyes were bright with mischief, and the dancing dimples around her mouth made her adorable. Any man, seeing her, would be glad to follow her lead. Boyd felt himself growing red with

embarrassment and indignation. How dared she subject him to public ridicule! What could he do to protect himself? He wanted to leave the room. In all his life he had never wanted to do anything as he now wished to leave that cafe—since it was manifestly impossible to walk across the room and box the pretty pink ears of Doris Marie. But the boys were humming the refrain, “Would you flee; would you flee?” No, he could not leave the room. The waiter was serving him. He must remain and eat his luncheon. He must appear quite unconcerned and at his ease. But he was increasingly embarrassed, and showed it. The other diners realized that he was being teased, and that the students had not just happened to seat themselves at his table. His very evident discomfort added to their enjoyment, and they yelled lustily for an encore. The students were willing to oblige. They repeated the song and then sang a refrain in unison:

“If a lemon you have won,
Cut and run; cut and run.
Don’t be a brave old son,
When you don’t enjoy the fun
Cut and run; cut and run,
Cut and run, run, run.”

The tune was catchy, the words easily memorized; the boys invited everyone to sing the chorus with them—and nearly everyone in the room accepted the invitation. Doris Marie and her companions led in the singing. It was to be noticed that they had no difficulty with either the words or the melody. Their evident enjoyment added much to the joy of the occasion.

Boyd finished his luncheon, conscientiously swallowing morsels of food that had no taste and that almost choked him, and gulping down hot coffee like a wood chopper. Then he left the room with all the dignity he could summon, knowing that his ears were scarlet, and that a sound

of suppressed laughter followed him. He hoped that he appeared detached, indifferent, superior and bored—that was what he was trying for—but every nerve and muscle was clamoring to “cut and run; cut and run.” The boys were following him—still singing. A crowd collected about the boys and joined in the singing. Boyd turned toward his office—but he couldn’t walk even the few blocks with that shouting mob behind him. He signalled a taxi and was driven to his home. Doris Marie had shown him that she was abundantly able to mete out punishment.

What would a natural young man have done, in his place? But that was unthinkable; such a man would not be in his place. A young man would have held the girl as long as she wanted to be held—and so would many old men—senile old fellows whose vanity would have been tickled,—and there’d have been no punishment. For the hundredth time Boyd Hunter asked himself why he was such an old jackass.

CHAPTER XI.

A few days later a letter was brought to Boyd with his breakfast. There were several letters, as a matter of fact, but this one in its beautiful thick cream-tinted envelope was first to claim his attention. He knew, at once, without opening it, that it was from Doris Marie, and he feared that it inaugurated a new torture. But when he had read it he was not so sure. He was puzzled. The letter was charming. So far as he could see it contained no hint of a sting.

"Dear Boydicum," he read: "This is an invitation to the nicest party that will be given by our bunch this year. You mustn't miss it. And to make sure that you will come, I'll tell you that I have arranged for you to take Aunt Clara. I know she doesn't get on your nerves as I do, and so she will help you have a really good time. I've been hard on you, I guess—but surely you are a good enough sport to acknowledge that you have brought some of your punishment on yourself. You surely understand that no girl likes to be told, as openly as you have told me, that she is anathema in a handsome young man's estimation. However I'm a pretty good sport myself, and if I'm anathema I'll not be mad about it any more—but just make the best of it. Here's my fist—metaphorically speaking. Let's be good friends. I'll save two dances for you—and I'll be my most charming self between dances. Here's hoping you and Aunt Clara have the best time ever. Enclosed find the formal invitation. Believe me, I've been a true friend to you, even though you don't think so, and I hereby renounce all hope of annexing you as a husband. I'll fix it up with the bunch, and you'll not be annoyed.

Ever your true friend,

"DAMN."

Boyd read the letter twice, and considered it thoughtfully, to the exclusion of all other topics, while eating his breakfast. Should he go to that party? Could he trust Doris Marie? How did it happen that she could arrange for him to take Miss Wilton? He felt that he would have preferred to take the initiative in the matter. He should have been given an opportunity to invite Miss Wilton to go with him. It looked too much as if Doris Marie, notwithstanding her protestations, still regarded him as her property to be disposed of according to her will. He didn't like it. He didn't want to go to that party, and yet he was pleased to have been invited. He didn't want to be ignored—and he was lonely—but he didn't trust Doris Marie. Her note sounded too sweet to be genuine. He feared she was planning further humiliation for him, and he decided not to accept that invitation. Couldn't he have a business engagement that would take him out of town? That was the idea—a call to some other city—then, quite without warning, the ridiculous refrain of that offensive song drifted through his brain—"if a lemon you have won—cut and run, cut and run." Of course Miss Wilton couldn't be called a lemon—except by Doris Marie, who frankly considered her so—and he would be an unspeakable cad to place her in a position where some such intimation might be made in her presence. "Cut and run,"—no, he'd be damned if he'd ever again be caught doing that. He'd go to that party. He'd hold his own with the best of them. He'd show Miss Wilton what a desirable escort he could be when he had the companionship of a real lady. He wrote a note of acceptance to the lady who was giving the party—wrote another to Miss Wilton expressing unbounded pleasure in the fact that he was to take her to the party, and wrote this to Doris Marie:

"My Uncomfortable Friend: Your fist rests in mine—metaphorically speaking. Don't forget that I'm to have

two dances. I begin this evening to take dancing lessons, hoping thereby to make your task less difficult."

The looked-for night arrived. The ball room was beyond criticism—not too many flowers—no furniture—not a chair for any meddlesome chaperone or middle-aged wall flower—an absolutely perfect floor—plenty of cozy nooks for petting purposes—lights shaded almost to extinction—seductive music with no musicians in sight to mar the effect with the ceaseless gyrating of their obtrusive elbows. It was the apotheosis of distinctive simplicity—and the young people loved it because it made an effective background for their jazzy costumes and their bacchanalian dances. They never guessed it was a work of art.

The hostess, too, was satisfactory in that she did not make herself too conspicuous, or in any way offensive to the modern young people who had so regally accepted her invitation. She gave of her hospitality freely, asking no return. She realized that there would be a majority of her guests who would not even take the trouble to thank her for a pleasant evening. She knew that they were quite likely to leave without a moment's notice, in a body, and without a word of farewell if anything chanced to displease them, or some one happened to suggest some other place that offered entertainment more to their liking. She was considered a successful hostess because the young people frequently stayed until daylight, and then demanded breakfast that they might have strength for long auto rides to curious country taverns before presenting themselves at the parental doors.

Boyd detested such orgies, yet he loved to dance. He had been born into a puritanical household where dancing was looked upon as a device of the devil, and he had so considered it until his rejuvenated body had brought him

into social conditions that forced it upon him. His young body thrilled to the exercise. He had to admit that he loved to dance. He was glad he had taken lessons, and that he danced so well as to be pointed out as a desirable partner. He enjoyed dancing with Clara Wilton. She seemed to feel the spirit of the music as he did, and they moved together rhythmically. They really danced. They were about the only couple in the room who did dance, and they were sneered at as mid-Victorian by the young animals who hopped about the room like jumping-jacks, or slithered along like snakes, and who called mid-Victorian whatever they found impossible to emulate.

But although he liked to dance with Clara, and wrote his name on her card for all the dances she would give him, it was not of her that Boyd Hunter thought when it was all over and he found himself too excited to go to sleep. He thought of the two dances Doris Marie had saved for him, and of which she did not deprive him, although it was a well known habit of hers to give a dance she had promised one cavalier to some one else who happened to strike her fancy at the moment.

"What is it about that she-devil's dancing that is so intoxicating?" he asked himself fiercely, and he knew that the word, intoxicating, exactly expressed what she had made him feel. And the word, she-devil, wasn't so bad either. The very fact that one who was a she-devil most of the time could be as angelic and adorable as she had been this evening was all that was needed to prove its aptness. He told himself that she furnished the exception that proved the rule, when she elected to fascinate.

What had she done that had seemed so charming? What had she said? In what way had she been so different? He did not know. All he could be sure of was that she had not exasperated him in any way, and that he could not forget

the two dances she had given him, and that he wished he might have had at least two more.

As for the other young people—they were as if they had not existed. Neither had they exasperated him. In fact, come to think of it, they had left him pretty much alone—not ostentatiously but as if to them he did not exist. He believed they had been given their orders by Doris Marie, and that they obeyed. Further consideration of the evening revealed the fact that it had seemed to be taken for granted that he and Clara Wilton were in a class by themselves, and must not be disturbed or annoyed in any way. He suddenly realized that they had been treated pretty much as the older generation were usually treated by those of Doris Marie's age. Then he saw that they had been left to themselves because they were not considered of sufficient importance to be treated in any other way. The girls were willing to dance with him because he danced well, but they were more than willing that he should return to Miss Wilton as soon as the dance was finished. He reminded himself that that was exactly what he had wanted, and there was no reason for his momentary feeling of annoyance. They were letting him alone, and now he could look forward to a little peace. All he had asked was to be left alone—and it appeared that his desire was to be granted. He was definitely paired off with Miss Wilton, and everybody was satisfied. Everybody? He thought Miss Wilton was not dissatisfied and he was sure her sister was delighted—but how did he himself feel about it? Well, not exactly pleased, not as overjoyed as he should be. The reason? Why, that was obvious! He did not want to be paired off with anyone. That usually led to marriage—and he had no intention of marrying. He knew it wouldn't be safe. His secret would be sure to be discovered by a wife. No, there was safety in numbers. He must keep away from Miss Wilton as much as he could, and try to

become acquainted with other girls. He might find some one else whom he could take to places occasionally. Joe-Anne might accept an invitation and since she was by far the most interesting girl in her set, she ought to make an evening very enjoyable to her escort. If Doris Marie were always to be as she had been this evening, he would like to take her once in a while—especially to places where there would be dancing. He felt that he'd like to take her—if he invited her, and planned the evening; that must be more satisfactory than to be taken by her—like a tail to a kite.

Finally he fell asleep—and dreamed of dancing with Doris Marie in a large room which they had entirely to themselves; and when they were tired, she sat in his lap to rest, and blew cigarette smoke in his ear, and he didn't mind it a bit.

Realizing that he must pay some attention to Miss Wilton, since she had been his partner for the dance, he sent her a dozen roses. Later, he called. Doris Marie chanced to be in the hall when he rang the bell, and so she admitted him, and invited him into the living room; then she excused herself, like a nice, polite, very demure little girl, and went to find her Aunt Clara. It was all just as it should be—just as he would have planned it himself—yet he wasn't quite satisfied. He didn't want to see much of Doris Marie—nothing at all, in fact, unless she chanced to be in her adorable mood—but he hoped she would return with Miss Wilton. He felt that his call would be less embarrassing with both girls in the room—at least, that is what he told himself.

But Miss Wilton came in alone. She was dressed in a simply made gown of old-rose crepe, and looked very attractive. Boyd was surprised to see how pretty she was—when not contrasted with the brilliant beauty of Doris Marie. Clara thanked him for her roses, one of which was tucked into her beautiful hair in exactly the place to be

most effective. Boyd had always liked to see women wearing natural flowers in their hair, and wondered if he had chanced to say so to Clara—or did she just happen to do the thing he liked? He felt comfortable with her,—very much at his ease—and he did not care whether they talked or not. It was nice, for once, to keep still and think. But when Miss Wilton talked of books and he discovered that he had read very few of the books she liked, he said so without embarrassment. He could not have done that had he been talking with Doris Marie. She always put a fellow on the defensive.

“I presume,” said Miss Wilton, thoughtfully, “that where you were obliged to spend most of your life, the new books were not accessible—and after all you haven’t missed much. We waste hours on books that are not worth remembering. But you appear like a man who has read—and thought—you’re not a bit like the silly young man of today—if you don’t mind my saying so—”

“I am honored,” murmured Boyd, then added, “but, do you know, I sometimes wish I knew how to be more like the young men I meet. I realize that there is a difference—yet I don’t know how to put my finger on it—how to describe it—analyze it—overcome my deficiencies—appear as young as—as my years. I wouldn’t know how to begin to make myself over.”

“Why try to do that? What do you see in the modern young man that you would really wish to emulate?”

“Well, for one thing—his self-assurance. For another, his adaptability—his power to please. I envy him his ability to enjoy life—to be satisfied with what seems to me of very little importance—because, you know, life is really made up of trifles, and if we value them are we not richer than we could be if we didn’t?”

“Think of spending a life-time concentrating on trifles,” exclaimed Miss Wilton, with dainty scornfulness. “I can

see you doing that! No, Boyd Hunter, if I could tell you how to make yourself like the young men of today, I would not do it. You are better worth knowing as you are."

Could any man desire a finer compliment? She had said it as if she meant it, too; it didn't sound a bit like flattery. He felt that she understood him—that she appreciated him—that she would never jeer at him as Doris Marie did. What a wife she would make for a man who dared to marry! How comfortable a home might be with her as its mistress. If only he dared—might it not be safe—no, wait a moment! What could he say when, as they sat in that home alone, she asked him to tell her of his boyhood in the mountains of France—of his mother, how she died, where she was buried—and perhaps how she had lived after leaving his father. No, it wouldn't be safe; he must never be lured into marriage.

And so, since he knew he could never marry, why wasn't it all right to see more of Doris Marie? See other girls, too, of course—but Doris Marie whenever he felt like it? It was true she was fearfully exasperating as a rule, but after all he supposed it did a fellow good to get riled up once in a while—kept his brain from becoming atrophied and made his blood course more rapidly through his veins. He'd been a good deal of a fool, thus far, in his relations with Doris Marie—but he was beginning to understand her better—he'd learn how to deal with her if he kept trying—and she was such a spicy little devil that it would be great sport to quarrel with her when he no longer felt that he was getting the worst of it.

Doris Marie entered even as he was thinking of her, and with a guilty start Boyd aroused himself, and realized that his mind had travelled a long way from the present hour, and his charming companion. He blushed with shame as he suddenly realized that Miss Wilton had been reading aloud and that he hadn't heard a word of what she had been

reading—something from Emerson—something rather prosy that she called exceedingly beautiful—and he hadn't heard a word of it! What should he have done had she asked his opinion about that selection from Emerson—but she wouldn't ask that now, for Doris Marie had entered—and she was looking positively dangerous.

“Aunt Clara,” she said abruptly, “I've just heard that you've been warning mother against me, and I want you to know that I won't stand for it.”

“Why, my dear!” protested Clara, gently. “We have a guest.”

“If he's going to become one of the family,” said Doris Marie, “he may just as well begin to get acquainted with us.”

It was Boyd's turn to look uncomfortable. Doris Marie turned to him, her eyes blazing with resentment.

“Aunt Clara told mother that if she didn't watch out, I'd be having a baby before I was married.”

“Doris Marie!” whispered poor Clara, who was too shocked for a more effective reprimand. She believed it was positively immoral to speak of a baby before it was born, especially to one of the opposite sex, and now her cheeks burned with maidenly shame.

“And she's got to stop such talk,” continued Doris Marie. “I won't have mother worried when it isn't necessary. It is hard enough for her, with her old-fashioned notions, to understand a daughter like me. But I'm not in half as much danger as you are, Aunt Clara, and not half as nasty-minded, either.”

“Oh, please!” protested Boyd, looking every whit as distressed as Clara. “You must realize, Doris Marie, that you are not only rude, but rather coarse as well.”

“No, Grandpa, I don't realize anything of the sort—but I rather like you for having the courage to say so. I'm neither rude nor coarse—I'm just honest enough to say

what I think, while most old-fashioned girls think what they wouldn't dare say. Now, I'm going to tell you exactly what happened. That day, when you dumped me on the floor, you put my finger out of joint."

"Oh, I'm sorry," interposed Boyd.

"It hurt like the mischief. Dicky pulled it into place, and I nearly fainted—"

"I—I—what can I say—"

"You needn't say anything. It's all part of the game." Doris Marie giggled: "I really brought it on myself. But my finger hurt so that Dicky had to drive the car home, and he came in to get some of my candy. He saw me walking across the room—kind of doubled up—my finger really did hurt, you know—and he told me that my form was getting all out of shape, and I ought to begin to wear corsets. And I replied that I wouldn't do it, because women who never wore corsets had babies much easier than those who did. Aunt Clara overheard that and of course she had to think the worst, and so she went to mother and threw her into a conniption fit. I just won't stand for it."

The artist in search for material for a cartoon would have counted himself in luck if he could have seen Clara and Boyd at that moment, for two more distressed looking mortals would be hard to find. Both were speechless, and red-faced—they kept their eyes averted, and they could not keep their fingers still, while they nervously crossed and uncrossed their legs in their attempt to appear at ease. And Doris Marie added her full share to the picture, for she was too genuinely angry to realize how shocked they were. Her eyes glowed like lightning in a stormy sky, and she was intent upon her business of getting rid of her temperamental fit in one big explosion, and becoming comfortable once more. She had no thought of the discomfort of her audience. "Prudes are always nasty minded," she confided to Boyd. "Now there sits Aunt Clara calmly showing

her knees, yet if I were to tell you that she has very pretty knees, with dimples in them, and that she ought to roll her stockings and show them—”

Clara had hastily pulled her dress over her knees, and now quite as hastily sprang to her feet. “Oh,” she gasped, painfully distressed, “Oh, I am so ashamed.” She ran towards the door, which Boyd opened for her.

“Don’t look so distressed,” he said, anxiously; “don’t let her worry you. You are all right.”

He would have tried to say more, for he was anxious to comfort her, but she couldn’t face him. She felt outraged and humiliated, and she longed to get away by herself where she could recover her composure.

“You are kind,” she faltered, then burst into tears and ran from the room. Boyd turned and looked at Doris Marie gravely and reproachfully. He opened his lips to reprimand her, but she interrupted.

“Now Boydicum,” she said, “you’d better not try to say it. You don’t know what you want to say, anyhow. You’re not equal to the situation. You are a hundred years old. You are a mossy old back number, and you’ve evidently lived in a country that is next door to the dark ages. Boydicum, I wish you’d tell me about it—where you lived when you were a little boy, and how it happens that you are so frightfully different from every one I know. Of course you’re not so very different from Aunt Clara, although you are younger than she is—but none of the men I know, who are your age, are such awful old maids as you are. Now be a good boy and tell me how come. Please.”

But Boyd had become wary and reserved. He sensed danger. He guessed that Doris Marie was going to allow herself to become charming, and he wanted to see her again in that mood,—but if that meant trying to invent a few lies about his boyhood—

"I think I'll be going," he said gravely: "I'm not in the mood for reminiscences."

"No," scoffed Doris Marie, "you're just too fearfully shocked to survive. A spade has been called a spade right before your shrinking little soul, and you're in for a nervous breakdown."

"For the sake of peace," replied Boyd, with his most dignified manner, "allow me to admit the truth of your accusation—and take my departure. And will you forgive me if I add that you have strange ideas of hospitality? You have spoiled what would have been a most enjoyable afternoon—in your determination to humiliate your aunt."

Doris Marie rushed to the door and turned the key, which she then appropriated.

"You don't leave this house," she said, furiously, "until you get my point of view. Aunt Clara had mother worried to tears. Do you think I'm going to stand for that?"

"It is evident to me that your aunt has been and is honestly anxious about you. I am not surprised. I'm sure she did not mean to make trouble—"

"Why can't she keep still about matters of which she knows nothing? I'm far better able to get on in the world—safely—than she is, because she goes about with her eyes shut and screams when she runs up against something that she doesn't like. I keep my eyes open, and I'm not afraid."

"You think yourself very wise," interrupted Boyd, "and therein may lie your danger. No one person could possibly know as much as you think you know—and live. You're like a baby playing with dynamite. If you were my daughter, I'd—"

"Your daughter!" giggled Doris Marie, "your daughter—and I've been thinking of myself as your wife. Boydicum, you must be harboring the soul of old Methuselah. You're absolutely the oldest man of your age this world has ever

known. You ought to be on exhibition. Here; take the key—no, I'll unlock the door. Go home; you make me tired."

Before he could say a word in protest, Doris Marie had unlocked the door, rushed swiftly from the room without a word of farewell, and was running lightly up the staircase. There was nothing left for him to do but obey her and go home.

CHAPTER XII.

Disappointing days drifted into weeks of humiliating memories. Slowly and painfully Boyd Hunter was fitting himself into his new life, and never once was his task made easier by the belief that it was worth while. It seemed to him little more than a disagreeable necessity born of a loneliness that he despised as much as he feared. Why should he, Boyd Hunter, fawn at the feet of a set of nin-compoops, when he longed to discuss important questions with men of his own age?—Fate had indeed played him a cruel trick.

In his determination to act as young as he looked, Boyd had frequently neglected his business in favor of some social demand, and that had helped him with Stafford, who was gradually and grudgingly becoming accustomed to his presence in the office. But he knew, now; that the old man would never accord him the love and respect—the wonderful devotion that had been given him before his rejuvenation. It was a loss that he'd always regret, for Stafford had been the one friend who understood him, and who had loved him in spite of his faults. Nor could Boyd get on intimate terms with any of the men who had been his old business friends. They were kind to him because they believed him to be the son of his father—but they resented his trying to match his business experience with theirs; they would not admit that a man of his apparent age could be as right as they were about anything, and they would not forgive faults in him that they had taken for granted—smiled at as an eccentricity—less than two years ago. They took the last drop of joy out of life, in so far as he was concerned. He could not take his life up at the point where he had changed it, and he could not succeed in being as

young as he looked. He was living proof of the power of mind over matter,—that power that is more often deleterious in its manifestations than it is beneficial.

Winter had passed. It was April—and spring was having its way with him—not with the senile satisfaction of age warming itself in the sunshine—but filling him with longings that could only add to his discomfort. It had made him realize how very desirable a real home would be—a wife—perhaps children—why not? After all, was there any real reason why he should not marry? Had he not been over-cautious in his anxiety to guard his secret? Curiosity concerning him was dying down—he was accepted as the son of his father—his friends understood that he simply would not discuss his past life or his parents—and they had about ceased questioning him. He was finding it much easier to think as a man of his apparent age would be expected to, and other young men no longer avoided him as conspicuously as they had when he first came among them after his regeneration. There had been a few instances of late, when he had so thoroughly enjoyed himself at a party as to have actually forgotten for an entire evening that he was not what he seemed. Those experiences were delightful. He believed they were coming more frequently. He dared look forward to a future when his years between thirty and seventy would be practically blotted from his memory, and he would really feel and act and think as young as he looked. Then why not do as any other man of his apparent age, and in his financial position would do—why not marry and establish a home and become a leading citizen? The very thought was alluring. He would play with it for a little while.

In case he decided to marry, whom should he ask to become his wife? The question should be easy, for of all the girls he had met, there were only two whom he could

possibly consider at all in that relation—Clara Wilton and Doris Marie.

He now began to consider them seriously, not as a young man would, but with all the intelligence of his seventy-year-old mind. He did not know that either girl would accept him, but he felt pretty sure that Miss Wilton would not say no. He was also sure that Mrs. Palmer would be better pleased to receive him as a brother-in-law than as a son-in-law—but he was convinced that she would offer no serious objection to him in the latter relationship. In fact, he could count on her help in either case. She had been a really good friend to him—the best friend he had ever had, in spite of her persistent efforts to control him, and he now admitted that he rather liked her. He wanted her to continue his friend. But he often wondered what she would say about that if she found out—she was not of the temperament to enjoy being hoaxed—and he believed she could hate vindictively.

Clara would be nearly ideal as a wife and mother and home-maker,—yes, and as a daily companion. She had a fine mind, well stored, and she was a good conversationalist. She was never tiresome—not even when airing her religious convictions. She was rather narrow-minded in the matter of religion. So was Mrs. Palmer. They were both good church members. He realized that they were glad to know that Boyd, the father, did not divorce his wife—and they were sure that Boyd, the son, was made equally happy by that fact. (Of course his wife was dead, but where and when and under what circumstances she had died, he had never been able definitely to ascertain.) Boyd brought himself back with a start. He must control his thoughts better than that. He must return to the present. He must forget the past—put it entirely out of his mind. He must return to his thought of Clara Wilton as his wife. She was deeply religious, and duty was her watchword,

and custom was her little earthly divinity. What would be her reaction—if she ever learned his secret? Suppose they had lived together for several years—and there were children—and their home life had been happy—and then she had learned his secret? What would happen? What would her religion drive her to do? What would be her DUTY?

Another thing: Could he be able to live with her even a year without telling her of his past? She'd feel that it was her right to know everything about him. She was like that. Perhaps she would not even marry him without being told—something. Would the story he had manufactured pass muster. Would she ask some question, suddenly, catch him at some unguarded moment—become suspicious because of his evasive reply—nag and nag until she had wormed the truth from him? That would be like her. That would be exactly like her, as he read her. She would be the type of wife who felt that she must own her husband, body and soul. And she would make public the story of his past—the story he manufactured and told her and which she would undoubtedly accept at first. Her love for him would make that story seem very romantic. She would tell it to her sister and to her best friends. She would want them all to know of the romantic past—the terrible loneliness of this fine man who had been obliged to grow up without any home life, without the care and guidance of a loving father. How she would dwell on the thought that he had been cheated out of a father's love and protection by a selfish mother, who had wished to keep him all to herself—cheated out of a natural home life. But she, Clara, his wife, would make that all up to him, and all their world should know how nobly she was fulfilling her mission. And all the time she really would be doing her best, and even when she got on his nerves—as he knew she would with her self-imposed missionary work in his behalf—even then he would know that she was a hundred times too good for

him, and he'd never be able to forget that he had not been honest with her.

No, the more he considered Clara as a wife—the more clearly he saw the dangers of such an alliance. He had been more or less aware of this all the time; now his careful deliberation convinced him that he must put her out of his mind once and for all time. And when he had decided to do this, she immediately assumed an importance in his imagination that he had not hitherto accorded her. He recalled a dozen little intimate conversations—many of them made delightful by her openly expressed belief in him and his wonderful possibilities, and more especially by her approbation of the stand he took on questions of morality. She delighted in him especially because he was not like the modern young men of whom she could not approve. His outlook on life was so much more stabilized. He was a man whom one could look up to—lean upon—be proud of. She did not say all this in so many words, and as if she already possessed him—but in a hundred ways she said it—and he was always so pathetically glad to hear it. He knew it wasn't true—but he was in need of the feeling of justification it gave him—it was something to be living a life that led a good sensible girl like Clara Wilton to say such things about him. It would be wonderful to live in an atmosphere of admiration—what couldn't it help a man to become! How any decent man would try to deserve it! And—when all was said, didn't he really deserve something of that sort? He had done nothing in all his life to hurt anyone. He had been the one to be hurt—and he had not complained—just gone on and done the best he could. He had not hurt anyone—except himself—when he had so foolishly consented to be rejuvenated. And he did not see how he could have met the resulting conditions any more wisely than he had. He had suffered more than he deserved. To

live with a sweet and amiable girl who found no fault with him—

Commonsense once more came to the rescue. It simply would not do. She would find out all that he was trying to conceal—and then she would no longer approve of him—there would be the very devil to pay. Better the burdens we know than those we know not of.

What of Doris Marie? He believed there was less chance of her accepting him; to be sure she talked a great deal of him as a future husband, but it was always in a way that was mystifying, and often most exasperating. He had never been able to decide what she was really thinking about it. He had never considered her seriously as a wife—he really could not do so now. Always something came up between them that made him realize how old he really was. He knew that he was old enough to be her grandfather, and frequently she talked as if she knew it also; but he felt sure she never guessed how nearly she was hitting on the truth. But she had not ceased to appropriate him since their first meeting—not even when she appeared to so magnanimously pass him over to her Aunt Clara.

He didn't believe that Doris Marie would nag, as Clara would, until she had wormed out the inmost secrets of his past life; indeed, she often said that no married partner had any right to ask questions, after the wedding ceremony, about the other partner's past. And as a point of fact, he didn't believe Doris Marie would pay much attention to anything, after marriage, except as it might influence the building up of a life together that should be exactly in accordance with her wishes and desires. Doris Marie believed in living in the present with a wary eye on the future. And if her future was not imperilled by whatever she might learn as to his past, he did not believe she would borrow any trouble about it. He could even imagine her finding amusement in visualizing the annoyances that had

followed his regeneration. His wife? Mary, the wife of his youth? He didn't believe Doris Marie would give her a second thought. She would probably decide that if the woman were not already dead, she ought to be, and anyhow she was as good as dead—and that was that!

What would life be like with Doris Marie his wife? They seldom agreed, they frequently quarrelled, and he often left her hastily because he feared, if he stayed, he'd box her ears or shake her, or perhaps even spank her. She made him angry enough to do almost anything. Yet he couldn't seem to keep away from her for any length of time; a word of commendation from her was worth more than a volume of praise from anyone else, and she seemed to dominate his thoughts whether he saw her or not.

"She goes to my head like wine," he thought; "I could never consider this matter carefully if she were near. I must make up my mind, before I see her again, whether or not it would be wise to try to win her."

And at that very moment Doris Marie entered the room.

"You haven't called for a week," she complained, "and Aunt Clara is wretched; so I thought I'd come over and see if you were sick."

"No, I am not sick."

"So I see."

"Won't you be seated?"

"Of course. I've come for a long talk."

"A long talk? I'm flattered."

"Are you? No spoofing, Boydicum."

"Yes, I really am flattered. You've been avoiding me of late, you know."

"Yes. I've been playing the game,—giving you every opportunity to know Aunt Clara. I'm here to talk about her

—I'm asking you what your intentions are—if you understand what I mean.”

She grinned impishly, as she said this, and yet Boyd was given to understand that she meant exactly what she said. She had grinned because she had used an old-fashioned expression that amused her.

“I know what you mean,” replied Boyd, frigidly, “but I don't—”

“I know,” interrupted Doris Marie, “you don't recognize my right to ask the question—standing on your dignity—all that sort of thing. But the fact is, I feel responsible because I really let Aunt Clara in for all she's going through.”

“I—I—must confess—that now I don't understand—”

“If I had not stepped aside, as I did, voluntarily—Aunt Clara could never have gotten you away from me.”

“You're sure of that?” He actually managed a sneer that a stage villain could have envied.

“Absolutely. Not because of anything you might have done about it, but because I should have made a row that would have sent Aunt Clara to the bow-wows. My family stand in awe when I get down to business. And they've themselves to thank for their punishment because they have always let me have my own way.”

“One can see that—and of course you take advantage—”

“Not as much as you'd expect, Boydicum—really. I'm pretty decent about it on the whole. Of course when I believe that what I want is reasonable—perhaps better for all concerned—”

“As it would have been,” interrupted Boyd, sarcastically, “had you clung to your fancied right in me—”

“Boydicum, are you going to ask Aunt Clara to marry you?”

“That is an impudent question. I do not acknowledge your right—”

"Uh-huh; you've as good as answered it. You are not going to propose to dear Aunt Clara. And she is going to feel horribly hurt if you don't."

"I don't believe it." Boyd was almost violent as he said that, possibly because he felt that Doris Marie was telling the truth. "You should not talk like that about your aunt. Think how she'd feel—"

"I do. That's what brought me here. I don't want her to feel any worse than she is feeling now, and she would if you went on with your philandering—"

"Stop it. You shall not malign me—"

"You'd call it philandering if anyone else had rushed a girl as you've rushed Aunt Clara—and then all of a sudden stopped inviting her anywhere. Now, can't you see how I would have saved her a heart-ache if I'd kept you from paying attention to her?"

"You, yourself, arranged for me to escort her—"

"I know it," admitted Doris Marie. "I was wrong about that, but I thought you ought to have an opportunity to find out for yourself whether she suited you. You remember how you wanted her to be invited to go with us to Dicky's studio? You let me see that you really wanted her when you had me. Well! Am I to blame for thinking you and she might discover that you suited each other? No, sir, Mr. Man, you can't lay the blame all on my shoulders."

"I do not admit that I have done anything to be ashamed of."

"I think, myself, that you're not to be blamed so very much, because you really had to have some opportunity to find out where you stand; but here's what I have against you; I believe you have known for quite some time that you didn't want to marry Aunt Clara and didn't intend to. Why not be a sport and 'fess up?"

"Honestly, Doris Marie, I never asked myself that question until today. I had just decided, when you came in that

it would not be right to pay her too much—I mean, to—to—invite her—”

“Do you know,” interrupted Doris Marie, “I should not be able to believe what you’re telling me if I didn’t know how very stupid you are. You can’t seem to see one little inch before your rather pointed nose—when it’s a question of girls. That’s why I decided to come over and set things right. Aunt Clara is going to feel all cut up about it—that can’t be helped—but if it went any farther she would feel a great deal worse, and that can be prevented.”

“I’m desperately sorry about it, Doris Marie. I’m hoping you are not right about it—that—that she—she doesn’t really care—”

“Oh, of course she cares—not that you are such a wonderful catch, you know, but you are practically her last chance. How could she help being disappointed?”

“Do you think I ought to—to propose marriage—that she has a right to expect that?”

“I thought of that way out myself. I thought you and she might be engaged a little while—just to save her face—and then you could stage a big quarrel and break it all off; but she’s so queer I don’t believe she’d let you pick a quarrel with her—once she was engaged to you. She believes that to give one’s promise means that it must be kept forever and ever, and she wouldn’t break an engagement a bit sooner than she’d apply for a divorce. I decided that wouldn’t really be a way out.”

“Well, then, what can I do?”

“You and I must announce our engagement.”

“Announce—wh-a-at?”

“You heard. I’m not a repeater. We will announce our engagement tomorrow. That won’t prevent Aunt Clara from having a heart-ache, but she’ll realize that the sooner she forgets you the better. Her pride will help a lot, too. She has an immense amount of pride. And as I’ve already

told you, she'll get over it much more easily than she would if it had gone on any longer. Besides she'll have to wonder if you and I had not been interested in each other all the time—and if she hadn't sort of butted in. She'll be a little ashamed of herself, I hope, because that, with her pride, would help her keep a stiff upper lip."

"But this—this engagement—between us—is it to be a sort of trial engagement—to be terminated when Miss Wilton has—" Boyd meant to add, "recovered from her heart-ache," but he could not have finished the sentence had it meant a million dollars to him. He was ashamed.

"No," replied Doris Marie, thoughtfully, "I think it must go farther than that or Aunt Clara won't believe in it. She'll think I just butted in, and she'll go to mother about it, and there'll be one big family row. A mere engagement won't do. We'll have to get married."

"Married! You don't mean that, Doris Marie."

"I most certainly do. You see, I do not feel as Aunt Clara does about divorce. We can be divorced as soon as we like after Aunt Clara has got over her crush on you."

"But listen. I do not believe in divorce. You've got to consider me—"

"I don't know why I have. I'm not to blame because you were too stupid to see that you were winning the affections of a nice girl who had no reason to think you were not in earnest. I'm doing this for Aunt Clara's sake and if you have a smithereen of manhood in your make-up you'll play up. You can't help seeing that I'm proposing the only way there is to save the situation."

"Do you think," asked Boyd faintly, "that we'd find divorce an absolute necessity? Might we not manage to get along together—make a happy home—"

"Maybe," replied Doris Marie, carelessly; "you never can tell. And of course we won't apply for a divorce if we don't want one." She was looking about the room as she

spoke and without a moment's pause she asked: "Would you expect me to live in this house?"

"I should be glad if you would so decide; but of course I should not insist."

"It would cost a lot to bring it up to date," said Doris Marie, "but it could be done. It is such a large house—but in one respect that would be an advantage. I should want several rooms set aside for the children."

"For what children?" asked Boyd, stupidly.

"For ours, of course. Did you imagine I was thinking of running an orphan asylum? I expect to have five children, not that I'm crazy about that number. I want four—but I've heard that one child dies in nearly every family, and if we have to lose one we'll still have four."

Boyd found no reply to this. He was too amazed for speech, as who would not be. He had not before realized how much of a child she was, underneath her veneer of sophistication.

Doris Marie had arisen and was drawing on her gloves. "My car is at the door," she said. "You needn't go home with me; but you'd better come over in the morning. I'll tell the folks tonight, and tomorrow we'll announce our engagement. We'd better make it short. I think we may as well be married in about four weeks."

CHAPTER XIII.

Boyd Hunter did not sleep well that night. He was probably the most astonished man in the city of New York. Once again his wheel of life had been given a twist that he had not expected. Could it be true that he was actually engaged to be married—or had he been dreaming? He had played a little with the thought of marriage—had almost reached the conclusion that he'd like to marry—had wondered if it would be safe to marry Doris Marie—yet he really had not believed for a moment that he'd actually propose marriage to her—or anyone else. Except for a brief period, he had declared he never would marry again—never, and he meant it. He knew he ought not to do it. And he fully realized, now, that such a step would be dangerous for him and unfair to Doris Marie. But what was he to do about it? He had not asked her to marry him. She had settled the matter as calmly, yet as dictatorily, as if she had been playing with one of her dolls. She had ignored him—except as a necessary actor in her new play. She had not cared whether he liked her proposition or not—she had simply declared that they would be married in a month—and it looked very much as if the wedding would take place unless, of course, he could take some drastic step to prevent it. But what could he do—except to run away, and that he most certainly could not do. No matter what the difference between them, Doris Marie always won. What could he do, now? He might as well sit back and take the gift the gods—and Doris Marie—had handed him.

Which meant he was not much longer to live alone. He was going to be married. He was engaged to be married to Doris Marie. To pretty, saucy, wilful little Doris Marie! The thought sent a delightful thrill along his spine, and

his heart danced, and skipped beats, and raced excitedly, and seemed to stand still—exactly as any good healthy young heart might be expected to do. A pleasant glow spread all over him, and somewhat to his surprise he heard a low laugh of pure content that he knew must have issued from his own lips. In spite of the dangers he had been fearing—dangers that he must live in fear of all the rest of his life—in spite of—everything—he was happy. It was great, it was wonderful, it was thrilling, to be engaged to Doris Marie.

She had intimated that tomorrow the preliminaries would all be arranged. She would attend to everything; he had only to play his part when his cue had been given him. He wondered what would be expected of him. The modern girl was so different from any girl that had ever before been known, that an old-fashioned man, who had given his whole life to business, could not be expected to understand, without being told, just how to play his part. Of course he would take Doris Marie a box of candy—also a box of flowers—and he'd do that because it was what he had done when he courted his first wife, and it was the only way he knew to show his joy in the fact that a desirable girl had agreed to marry him. But when he thought how that engagement had been brought about, he smiled somewhat cynically, and wondered if he wouldn't better appear wearing a dog harness, and present her with a little whip.

"After all," he said to himself, quite reasonably, "why lay it all to Doris Marie? It couldn't have happened—at least I think it couldn't—if I hadn't been willing. While I'd have preferred to arrange it all myself—yet I'm well pleased, on the whole. We're engaged, and if she isn't satisfied, she has only herself to blame. And she will see it that way, too. Doris Marie is a good little sport."

Boyd made his appearance at the Palmer home at the appointed hour, and was met at the door by Doris Marie.

"Kiss me," she commanded, holding up her painted lips. Boyd didn't like to touch them with his, and so deposited a reluctant kiss on her cheek, which was thickly powdered, but not sticky. "M-m-m," grunted Doris Marie, "it is evident that I've got to teach you how to kiss."

"Rub that nasty stuff off your lips," suggested Boyd, "and perhaps I can do better."

"Oh, so that's it! Well, I'll think it over—decide which I prefer—your kisses or my lip-stick. Come in here—'will you walk into my parlor,' said the spider to the fly—daddy stayed home from the office purposely to take his allotted part in the solemn conference; just as if what he could say would make any real difference."

The two men shook hands as if they had not met in years. Mrs. Palmer put her head on Boyd's shoulder and did a good imitation of grief—the accepted reaction of the loving mother about to lose her baby daughter. Doris Marie took it all in with sparking, mischievous, knowing eyes, and grinned impudently, favoring Boyd with an elaborate wink, which she thought her parents did not see.

"My boy, I'm surprised," began Mr. Palmer, with what he hoped was the emotion the occasion demanded, and he wiped his nose with emphasis to finish the sentence.

"But not displeased, I trust," murmured Boyd, conventionally.

"Not a bit displeased," responded Mr. Palmer heartily; clearing his throat as if for speech making, "in fact. I may say—"

"Make it snappy, Dad," ordered Doris Marie; "he'll take for granted all that son-of-my-dear-old-friend stuff. What Dad wants to know, Boydicum, is how much money have you?"

"Doris Marie," shrieked Mrs. Palmer; "Oh, I'm so ashamed of you."

"You needn't be. Boyd and I are going to be absolutely honest with each other right from the start."

Boyd cringed guiltily, realizing just how honest he was with her. He tried to cover his embarrassment by thrusting into the hands of Doris Marie the tokens of love he had brought with him, and which he had been awkwardly holding as if he hated to part with them.

"Flowers? Very pretty; but you needn't bother to bring flowers except when we're going somewhere. Candy? Mother, dear, you take the candy. Thanks, Boydicum, but after this you'd better bring me cigarettes. Candy makes me fat."

"To get down to facts," interrupted Mr. Palmer, watch in hand, "I'm due at the office, you know," apologetically, "and it isn't as if you were a comparative stranger—and—and to get down to facts—ahem—"

"I am at your service," murmured Boyd politely, but how he longed to strangle his old friend, for making this absurd fuss when he knew as much as anyone needs to know about his finances.

"Mere matter of form," said Mr. Palmer. "Of course, as your father's legal adviser, I know that the business was doing well—all your affairs were in good shape—when you stepped in—"

"My affairs are still in good shape," interrupted Boyd somewhat more icily than the case required. "Why should you have any doubts about that?"

"Oh, I haven't—I really haven't, you know," replied Mr. Palmer hastily—"but—ahem—you—you must realize—ahem—that you're not sticking to the business as closely as your father did—"

"That is not necessary. He was building it up. It practically runs itself, now—"

"No business runs itself long—without running down," replied Mr. Palmer, gravely.

"It is not running down. It is in good shape—and I may know more about it than you think I do."

"Undoubtedly. No criticism intended—just a word of warning—your dear father would have understood. I'm sure—"

"Would he?" Boyd's lips curled cynically, but he quickly controlled his temper, realizing the danger. "Oh, well," he added, "I'll get into the harness in time. We have a well-organized staff, you know, and there's Stafford, who's been with us from the start, and who knows the business from A to Z—"

"I've been told that Stafford was going to leave—or you've discharged him—or something. What about it?"

"Stafford going to leave!" Boyd's voice held genuine astonishment. "First I've heard of that," he added, "and of course it isn't true."

"Glad to hear it—very glad. He'd be a great loss. Don't let Stafford get away from you. Well—that's about all—except the conventional 'bless you my children' and now I must be off." He dabbed a pecking kiss on his wife's cheek—gave his daughter another, shook hands all over again with his future son-in-law, and hurried away as if he'd been caught in a crime and believed the police were after him. He was glad that job was over. It was silly at best—and quite unnecessary—but Mrs. Palmer had insisted—she'd got to have everything done as it was done in stories, or make a scene. And Doris Marie had humored her—except when her mother chanced to oppose her. He knew very well that his daughter had quite made up her mind to marry the young fellow—and nothing he might have learned about his finances would have influenced her one way or the other. He had caught the wicked wink she had bestowed upon Boyd when she brought up the subject of

finances, and understood its meaning. He knew Doris Marie perfectly. She would argue that if Boyd hadn't enough money to take care of her, she could persuade her father to put up the remainder. Why not? What else were fathers for? And wouldn't she have it all when her parents passed away?

"My baby sister was suddenly called away," vouchsafed Mrs. Palmer when her husband had disappeared. She was preparing to serve tea—not because anyone wanted it, but because she believed it was the proper thing to do. She delivered the news with tears and a look of reproach. She wanted Boyd to realize, without being told, that he had given everyone to understand that he meant to propose to Clara, and that he had caused the dear girl intense suffering. She wanted to rebuke him for that, even though she had just accepted him as her prospective son-in-law.

"Now Mother," expostulated Doris Marie, severely, "do show a little sense, and keep still. Understand? **Keep** still. You know that is what Aunt Clara made you promise to do."

Boyd's discomfiture increased by leaps and bounds. He'd have given fifty dollars to take his hat and leave—but at that moment a line of that detestable song ran through his mind: "If you do not like the fun, cut and run; cut and run." He'd never be able to forget that. Had Doris Marie known it, she had done more than anyone else had ever done to make him stand and face a disagreeable situation.

"Very well," said Mrs. Palmer with exaggerated dignity, "you will serve the tea yourself. Since I am ordered to keep my mouth shut, I may as well leave the room," and she did.

Doris Marie giggled. "Of course," she said, "you've guessed all that mother could have told you—but it's much better not to let her say it. She'll be glad I shut her up when she gets over being huffy. Now everyone can pre-

tend that you never dreamed Aunt Clara cared for you—and that will make things slip along like an elephant on ice.”

“You were right to interpose,” said Boyd heavily, “and I’m infinitely obliged to you—but I do think you might have used more tact. You need not have told your mother to shut her mouth.”

“I had to do exactly what I did do. It takes courage, promptness and vigor to get mother’s mouth shut when she’s all wound up to spill something. And the less said about Aunt Clara’s heartache, the better for all concerned—as I’ve already intimated. Now come over here and sit by me. We’ll get cozy and comfy and talk. We’ve got oceans to talk about. I simply adore making plans.”

She pushed him into a corner of a davenport so magnificently stuffed that he felt as if he’d never be able to pull himself to the surface again—then threw herself across his knees, rested her head on the arm of the davenport, and lighted a cigarette. “Now,” she exclaimed, “we’re all set. Let’s go. First, about our wedding trip. Thought anything about that?”

“Why no,” confessed Boyd; “I haven’t had time, have I?”

“You might have done a little planning after I left you, last night; but never mind, I have it pretty well planned.”

“Yes?”

“To begin with, we’re not going to spend a lot of money on our honeymoon. It’s going to cost so much to make that old house over that we must save on the trip.”

“Do you mean to tell me that you are inclined to be economical?”

“Does that surprise you?”

“It surprises me very much.”

“Are you pleased?”

"I think I am. I am not a very wealthy man—although we shall have enough to make us comfortable."

"Well, I'm not exactly economical. I don't like throwing money on one thing that might be spent to greater advantage on another. I like to spend money, I'm simply crazy about it—but—I like to know that I get value received."

"How did you learn to spend money—and get value received?"

"Oh, I've had an allowance since I was seven years old. I made such a fuss that daddy just had to give me one—and after he began it he was glad, because he saw I spent it sensibly. When I knew he ought to increase my allowance I simply insisted—and I always got the increase. I'm going to do that way with you."

"How much are you going to insist on my giving you?"

"I don't know yet. I'll have to look over your books, first, and find out how much you can afford to give me. I'd never want more than you could afford—but believe me, neither would I accept any less."

"All right; we'll try to be fair."

"Now about our honeymoon. Let's go on a long automobile trip—riding every day until we find a nice place to stop, where we can meet people, and dance at night. And we'll make our first stop at a place I know in the Adirondacks. I have a friend staying at a camp there, and she can't get a drop of hooch for love or money—"

"Did you say hooch?"

"Yes, hooch—and she writes me that she is simply dying for a cocktail. Her parents are Drys—strict as strict—and they won't have any kind of liquor in the house—that is if they know it. It has been in the house very frequently, just the same." Doris Marie giggled as she thought how her friend's parents had been hoodwinked. "Dicky and I went up there once and took her some—and we nearly got

caught, too. It was terribly exciting. Think what a scream it will be for us to hide a nice little case of hooch in our car, and take it to her on our wedding trip. We'll have to outwit the hi-jackers—and there'll be some real excitement, believe me."

Boyd could hardly believe the testimony of his own ears. For a moment this child had shown herself so wise and sensible and lovable—so everything that any man could desire for a wife—and then to suddenly spoil it all by planning to break one of the laws in which he was particularly interested—and, too, on their wedding trip. He'd have to assert his authority sooner or later; might as well begin now. She must understand that, while he was willing to please her whenever possible, he meant to be master in his own house, and he had no intention of becoming a law breaker, or of allowing her to become one.

"You must know," he said firmly, "that I believe in prohibition; also that I obey the laws of my country, and that I expect my wife to do so, as well. There'll be no liquor carried in my car—ever—nor will my wife carry liquor about the country if I can prevent it. Please understand that."

Doris Marie straightened herself, and looked him in the eye, a mischievous quirk at the corners of her lips making them adorable.

"Do you mean all that, Boydicum?" she asked, "or is it just a gesture?"

"I mean it—absolutely," he replied sternly.

"What would you do if I didn't obey you?"

"I can't tell until that happens. I sincerely hope I shall never be obliged to meet that difficulty—but you may be quite sure that I shall be able to find some way to prevent my family from becoming lawbreakers."

Doris Marie sprang to her feet and stood facing him—

eyes blazing, lips mutinous, chin up, the picture of indignation.

"Would you do anything," she demanded, "to spoil my nice honeymoon?"

"Not if I could help it—and keep my self respect."

"Every woman should plan her own honeymoon—have it exactly to her liking. Don't you know that, you great big booby?"

"Not when she elects to become a law breaker," replied Boyd firmly. He was finding the scene trying, but he felt that his future happiness depended upon his carrying it through according to his beliefs.

"Law! Piffle! Who cares about the law?"

"I do."

"Not really," taunted Doris Marie; "you are only afraid you'll be caught."

"You can put it like that if you choose."

"Well, I'll never be bossed like a slave—not by any one. I give you warning."

"Then we'll consider our engagement broken."

Boyd's voice was low, restrained, firm. There was a tone of finality in his last remark that said even more than the spoken words. He was almost glad to have the engagement broken. Doris Marie was impressed. This was a new experience—to have any plan of hers vetoed, and not be able to budge her opponent in the slightest degree. She saw that she was beaten, that he was not enthusiastic on the marriage question—and she did not intend to let him break their engagement. The mutiny died out of her eyes, and she became reflective, and when Doris Marie assumed a meditative air she was simply adorable.

"After all, why spoil all her plans," she was thinking, "just because a friend needed a drink."

"Well," she said finally, "I suppose it is only fair that you should have your way some of the time. I'll be sporting

about it. We'll cut out the hooch in the honeymoon auto." She spoke reasonably and without a hint of pique. Seating herself beside Boyd, she took his hand in hers and rested her cheek against it. "I hadn't guessed it, Boydicum," she said, "but you're some cave man. Bully for you! Now let's go on with our planning, beginning where the hooch suggestion balled up things. Lean over, old cross-patch, and we'll kiss and make up."

"Can't you get some of that stuff off your lips?" asked Boyd, who was beginning to realize that, after all, he needn't be quite as much like a dog in harness, as he had believed himself to be.

"I'll try, just this once. If I don't think it's worth while, I'll keep the lip-stick and cut out the kissing." She was energetically rubbing her lips with her pocket handkerchief between sentences. "You know a man's lips are horrid when he is not freshly shaved, and some men will kiss with their nasty wet teeth. I notice you're inclined that way. Now stoop over and I'll show you how it ought to be done." She showed him, and he was really enjoying it, when her mercurial nature again asserted itself.

"That was nice," she said, "but enough is enough. I adore petting parties, but not too long continued."

"We'll agree as to that," replied Boyd, quickly—a little too quickly, Doris Marie thought, but she decided not to make a point of it, although she felt that he should be told that he erred quite offensively in not making an exception of petting parties with her as the other party.

"Now," she began, in her most businesslike manner, "it is time for you to go—and we'll manage the farewell without any kissing."

"Angry with me?" asked Boyd a little anxiously. The question pleased her. It showed that he really hadn't meant anything personal but was finding fault with petting parties as usually conducted.

"Not a bit, Boydicum," she responded warmly. "In fact, I love you more, this very blessed minute, than I ever believed I could. All the same, I want you to go now, because Joe-Anne is coming and we've got a raft of things to talk about."

"Are you going to talk over our engagement—so soon?"

"Of course; isn't she my best friend? And what fun would there be in being engaged if one couldn't talk it over?"

Boyd's thoughts flew back to his first engagement, and Mary's desire to keep it secret as long as possible, because it was too sacred to be talked over like any ordinary occurrence. He liked the old way best—but of course he couldn't say so. His silence did not pass unnoticed.

"Don't tell me, Boydicum, that you want to keep our engagement a secret, else I shall think you are hoping for a chance to back out,—and I assure you, dear boy, you haven't a chance."

"Don't be coarse," snapped Boyd, and took his leave, without another word, leaving a most astonished girl behind him.

And he was equally astonished. Why should he have flared up like that? Doris Marie had said nothing that might not have been expected of her. Hadn't it offended him more than usual because he had been thinking of Mary and the days of their courtship? Mary had been so very dear! So maidenly and winsome and reserved. How proud he had been of her—how afraid he'd hurt her feelings! What would she have said if, in the early days of their courtship, he had commanded her not to be coarse. But that couldn't have happened, because she never was coarse. How different she had been from the modern girl! How infinitely more desirable!

But was she? He hadn't been able to keep her. She had left him, without warning, and he had never heard from

her again. What had happened to her? How he wished—no, he did **not** wish to know how she had managed to live. It was enough for him to know that she had preferred to live away from him. Mary may have been very sweet and docile in appearance—much more so than the modern girl—but not even Doris Marie could treat him worse than Mary had treated him. He was glad Doris Marie was not like her. He would never again be fool enough to make silly comparisons. He was sorry he had told Doris Marie not to be coarse. He would send her a large box of her favorite cigarettes—and he hoped she would forgive him.

Cigarettes! Cigarettes instead of roses and bon bons! They really did not seem like a fitting expression of affection. Cigarettes! How about gloves? He had never seen Doris Marie wearing gloves. Probably she'd prefer silk stockings, or some undies, or a box of rouge.

Cigarettes for the girl one hopes to marry! Bah!

His thoughts drifted back to that never-to-be-forgotten day, more than thirty years ago, when he had returned to his home carrying a beautiful little work basket—a birthday gift for his wife, only to learn that she had left him and had no intention of returning. The sun left his world with the reading of her contemptuous letter. He had never guessed that she was not as happy in their home life as he had been. Thinking it over in the long lonely evenings that followed, he recalled many incidents that should have warned him, had he not been so immersed in his business. She had told him in her farewell letter that business was his god—that he cared much more for his office than he did for his home, that she refused to stay at home alone and keep house for a mere machine, when she could go back into the business world herself and make as good a living as he could ever provide, and that she could provide for herself and still know the joys of companionship—which he did not provide. He was young, with his way to make in

the business world, and he felt that he must give his business the best of himself until he got it well on its feet. But he had wanted to do that, primarily, in order that his wife should be provided with everything that so wonderful a wife deserved. It was after she left that he really did make his business his god, and earned many of the hard criticisms that were aimed at him during the years that followed. Now, he told himself, now he would do differently. He would neglect his business, if necessary, to make Doris Marie happy. This doubtful experiment in domestic happiness should be turned into most satisfactory attainment.

CHAPTER XIV.

"Well," inquired Joe-Anne, tossing her hat and coat on Doris Marie's bed, "what's on your mind? Why the pathetic cry for companionship?"

"Joe-Anne," very solemnly, "I've done it."

"Done what? Murdered Boyd Hunter?"

"I've promised to marry him."

"Oh, I rather hoped you'd murdered him. But perhaps this will be sufficient. And of course a promise of that sort needn't make you unhappy for any length of time. It never has, has it?"

"I didn't think you'd be quite as cruel as—as you—oh, Joe-Anne, why can't you be kind to me?" Doris Marie was close to tears, and immediately Joe-Anne dropped her air of raillery.

"Why my dear!" she exclaimed, "you are not really in earnest, are you? Stop crying, this instant, and tell me—are you actually going to marry Boyd Hunter?"

"That's what I've been trying to make you understand for ever and ever so long," sobbed Doris Marie; "and you are the very first to be told of my engagement—except dad and mother—and I did think you'd be interested." Doris Marie was wiping the tears from her eyes, and looking angrily at her damp handkerchief. "Nothing in this world makes me so tearing mad," she said, "as to bust out crying." Smiles chased the tears away as she laughed over this last slangy remark. "Bust is right," she added; "I didn't know I was going to dissolve like that. I never have before when I've gone and got myself engaged. But somehow this is different; it seems to clutch at my heart."

"Is that because you are in love?" asked Joe-Anne, hopefully.

"How many times must I tell you that I do not believe in love. I respect Boyd more than any man I've ever met. But he takes everything so seriously that I feel more bound to go through with it than I have felt with the other men—and I think that frightens me a little. No girl likes to lose her sense of freedom—"

"Nor does any man, I fancy," interrupted Joe-Anne. "If we could read Boyd Hunter's mind, about now, I think we'd find that he is feeling nearly as uneasy as you do."

"I'll bet he is," replied Doris Marie, candidly; "he hasn't acted any of the time as if he were crazy to get married to anyone."

"I believe," said Joe-Anne, thoughtfully, "that there are cases where a man and woman do not weep because they are no longer free when they have agreed to marry. They realize that each is necessary to the completion of the other, and they can't be happy until they are united. That is love. That means happiness in married life. I shall never marry until I find the man who will make me feel that way about him, and who will feel that way about me."

"As I've said before, Joe-Anne, you'll never be married. You think as your grandmother was taught to think—and the people of our grandmother's period put the divorce court on its feet. If they had realized that each was necessary to the completion of the other, there couldn't have been any divorces."

"Being human, they made mistakes; but they must have been awfully happy while they believed themselves to be in love."

"And spent their time telling pretty lies to each other. None of that for me, thank you! I believe happiness must have absolute truth for its foundation, and Boyd and I are starting out with that fact in mind. There are to be no evasions, no secrets, no form of camouflage between us. Consequently there can be no disagreeable surprises."

"But why do you want to do it? That's what I can't understand. What do you expect to get out of it that is really worth while? You have everything a girl could possibly want, now, and you are free—and if you wait, you may find real romance—"

"There you go again. Joe-Anne, you're incorrigible. Listen; this is what I want—what you will never have unless you stop looking for a fairy prince to come along. I want to be mistress in a home of my own. That's a form of independence that you can't have in your father's house. I want to invite my friends without having my list criticized and curtailed. That's a form of independence you can't have in your mother's house. I want children. You can't have them without you are married—as custom now dictates—and give them any desirable social relationships. I hope to live long enough to see the unmarried mother recognized—if she is a good mother and brings up desirable citizens; but at present marriage and a husband and a home are necessary. So, I'm acquiring them, and I'm making as careful choice as I know how. So far as I can judge, Boyd Hunter supplies all the requirements—and I believe I shall be as satisfactory as wife, mother, housekeeper and social companion as anyone he could find. And he really needs what I can give him, because he couldn't possibly get it for himself. His training has made him so old-fashioned that he simply doesn't know how to place himself."

"Well," sighed Joe-Anne, "you're doing it. And it really does look as if you knew what you were up to. So here's hoping you'll be very happy. Now what can I do to help the good work along?"

"Can't you think up something different in the way of announcements? I've had my engagement announced so many times that I'm all out of ideas; and you are so good about planning stunts that are out of the ordinary."

"You might surprise the world by not making any announcement, just run away and be married—"

"Oh, Joe-Anne, you wouldn't have me do that. Why I want all the frills there are! That's the only real fun there is in being engaged."

"All right; I'll see what I can do; but when I'm engaged I won't have a curious mob spying on my happiness."

Both Boyd and Doris Marie found the busy days that followed their betrothal most exciting and in every way satisfactory.

Most of their energy and enthusiasm was given to the purchase and fitting out of the new automobile for the honeymoon trip. When ready it contained all the luxuries to be secured, as well as some of their own devising, and represented hours of joyous companionship.

Then, for Boyd, there were hours devoted to business conferences with Stafford, who was patently pleased to know that young Boyd was to be away for an indefinite length of time. Also, there was the work of remodelling his old home. At first he had not been quite happy about that, but he soon realized that to change everything about the house as much as possible would help him to forget the past. He told Doris Marie that he believed it would be better to sell the house and build a new one in the wealthier part of the city—but Doris Marie promptly vetoed that suggestion. Having made her plans for making over the old house into something unique and striking and more commodious than the bungalow Boyd had planned, she was not to be induced to change her mind. She insisted that the work of carrying out her plans begin at once, and argued that Boyd ought to be willing to please her in this matter since she had so cheerfully given up her jolly plan to do a little rum-running on their wedding trip, and he made a shrewd guess that he'd be obliged to let her have

her own way many times to pay for her giving up cheerfully on that one occasion.

An architect was taken into the old house on the day following the announcement of their betrothal, and Boyd was surprised at the good sense, the artistic preception, and the applicability of Doris Marie's suggestions. She knew what she wanted, was quick to see, when told why she could not get the effect desired, and equally quick in suggesting an alternative. She also showed herself versatile in ways of getting her effects at a minimum of expenditure, and she never scandalized the architect by mixing periods when outlining the decorations desired. Boyd quickly found himself relegated to a position as interested audience and amiable purse-holder—and he was surprised at himself because he didn't mind that at all. Doris Marie had given him so much reason to distrust her judgment that he was pleased, now, to find her so capable. He was admiring her very much, and their happiness together seemed assured.

And the little bride-to-be was equally charming when they appeared at the various functions given in their honor. Without over-doing it, as he had feared she might, she let it be seen that she was greatly interested in him, and that she respected him and was almost ready to obey him, and that she believed in their future happiness together. She never once embarrassed him by sitting on his lap before their friends, or insisting upon a public petting party, as she had often done in the days when she had declared that they were only trying each other out, with a view to matrimony. She had seemed to grow years older, quite suddenly. She was already a woman, with cares and duties that required all her attention—and she was far more attractive and adorable than she had ever been before. Even in her relations with her parents, this remarkable change for the better was noticeable, and they were delighted, if aston-

ished. They had never expected to have her ask their advice about anything, as she was doing now—and they found it a welcome relief to be no longer under her jurisdiction as a sort of imperious guardian who was responsible for their behavior.

The three weeks following their betrothal was absolutely ideal, not only in the estimation of the two most vitally concerned—but also in the opinion of all their little world.

“I can’t understand it,” said Mr. Palmer to his wife: “Doris Marie was so nasty to Boyd at first, and now she seems absolutely wrapped up in him.”

“We never have understood Doris Marie,” sighed Mrs. Palmer. “And I don’t know, now, whether she is in love with Boyd, or in love with love. Sometimes I think she has just hypnotized herself into the belief that she is ideally happy.”

“Well, if you’re right, here’s hoping she’ll never come out from under the spell. To be quite frank with you, my dear, I’ll feel like drawing a long breath of relief when Doris Marie is safely married. She’s been a good deal of a problem.”

“Yes, she has,” assented the mother. “I suppose we’ll have to give some credit to all the stuff that’s being printed about the failure of modern parents—but for the life of me I can’t see how I could have done any better.”

“You couldn’t,” replied her husband, vigorously. “No one could. Doris Marie has been a puzzle since she was a day old. Parents of our day have been presented with a race of young people utterly unlike any ever before known—and we weren’t given the key to their personalities, neither were we warned that an entirely new race was coming. All the same, our little girl has been most interesting and diverting—and at times very, very lovable—to all of which his wife assented. And then they relapsed into a delightful hour of reminiscing, during which they recalled

all the sweetest and most interesting events of their daughter's career, and forgot the troubles she had caused them. Her barque had drifted into safe waters, and they were very happy.

"I think, Boydicum," Doris Marie was saying, "that we'll make our honeymoon trip only half as long as we had planned."

"Your reasons?" asked Boyd, lazily.

"It will be only half as expensive."

"It doesn't sound so very expensive to me, as you had the original plans mapped out."

"Well, it really wasn't—as honeymoons go; but what's a honeymoon anyhow? Only a custom; we'll be just as securely married as if we'd roamed around the world for a month and spent a fortune. We are really going on a honeymoon trip at all just because it is expected of us."

"Oh, I don't know about that. I think we're going to have a dandy good time."

"Well, I think it will be more fun to come back here, when it's half over, go to some dinky little hotel where none of the bunch would ever think of looking for us—and finish our celebration by concentrating on that house."

"Of course what you say goes."

"And then I won't have to confess to poor Betty Sue that you wouldn't let me bring her the hooch she is just dying for. I'll write her that we've made a complete change in our plans, and she must get some of the others to help her out."

"You couldn't write her, I suppose, that we were not going to begin life together by breaking laws?"

"I'd never dream of doing that. Why Boydicum, what right have we to interfere? We weren't born to be acting conscience for anyone on earth except ourselves. All our friends must live their own lives as we expect to live ours. Besides, I might break that law another time. I haven't

said I wouldn't. I just gave up because it was your time to have your own way."

"Wouldn't you abide by my judgment?" asked Boyd reproachfully.

"Most certainly not. The good Lord gave me a modicum of judgment all my own; guess I'm not going to wrap it up in a napkin and bury it." Then she chuckled adorably. "Say, Methuselah, darling, you didn't think I could quote scripture like that, did you? Isn't it a point in my favor?"

"Quite the contrary—especially if it leads you to call me Methuselah. Boydicum is bad enough. Can't you think up something a little more appropriate that would please you just as well?"

"You object to all my pet names. Now there was grandpa—"

"Doris Marie, you promised—"

"Oh, I know. I'm not going to call you that. At least, I'll begin by calling you father—when the proper time comes. I don't mean to allow our children to say daddy, or papa or mamma; they must call us father and mother."

Boyd could never become used to the casual way in which Doris Marie talked of their children. It wasn't done by the newly engaged when he was young and yet he had to admit that there was something rather charming about it. And there was reason in her contention that it was no worse to mention babies five minutes before they were born than it was five minutes after they were born—and that what was true of a five-minute period held equally good for any length of time.

Boyd had moved his personal belongings to his club while his home was being remodelled, but he had left the Jap in charge of the house. When he returned to his rooms in the club building after learning from Doris Marie that the honeymoon trip was to be curtailed, he was feeling more than a little depressed. He found that he did not want that

trip to be curtailed. He wanted to get away from the city. The longer he could stay away, with a reasonable excuse for doing so, the better pleased he would be. He hadn't realized this until Doris Marie changed their plans. He especially wanted to get away from his office, where he was constantly being reminded that Boyd Hunter's son could not take his father's place—simply because no one believed he could. He was heartily tired of being convinced that his beloved business could be most admirably conducted if he never visited the office at all. There was no little irony in the thought that it was to enable him to return to that business and manage it that he had concocted the lie which he must enact to the end of his days. Not only had he wished to return to the business, it had also been a strong desire to return to old Stafford, his beloved friend, whom he could not discharge and be happy, and who would never again be his beloved friend. How cruelly life had used him.

Boyd saw many weary hours when he felt that it would be good to sell out the business and go away where no one had ever heard of the man he used to be. He often thought how good it would be to go away among strangers and carve an honored place for the man he was today. He was thinking of this when he carelessly took the letter the clerk handed him, with his key, and went up to his room.

"But I couldn't go now," he thought almost regretfully. "I cut my bridges behind me when I became engaged to Doris Marie. There will always be a Boyd Hunter who is too much like the old man ever to please even the best friends of that old man."

This thought served to bring back the terrible feeling of loneliness that he had known ever since his return to New York. He wondered why he should suffer from that now. He had scarcely suffered from it at all since his engagement to Doris Marie, and he had believed that he never again would be obliged to endure it. Doris Marie was such

an unexpected girl—so different from other girls—she always kept a fellow guessing. He might not always approve of her, but she certainly kept him from worrying over his undesirable position in life. Then why should he feel so depressed just because she had cut short their honeymoon trip? That trip couldn't go on forever at best, and he couldn't very well run away—"cut and run; cut and run—" how that damned song stuck by!

He threw himself into an easy chair without removing his hat and overcoat, and read his letter. It was from a well known hotel in Boston, and was written by Hicks Jarou.

"I am at the above address for a few days," he read, "and am most anxious for a conference with you before taking the steamer back to my place in France. It is on a matter of some importance to you, as I feel sure you will decide—and I am equally sure you would prefer that it should not be taken up by correspondence, and that you would not wish to have me appear in your New York office. I would suggest that you come to me immediately upon receipt of this—and I also suggest that you bring the check you gave me for my services, and which must have been returned to you, since it was paid promptly by your bank. I mention this in case that what I have to tell you should cause you to decide that you would not care to have me looked up and questioned concerning the check which—as you cannot fail to remember, was for services added to my charge for curing your cancer."

For a few moments Boyd sat as if paralyzed. He faintly realized that the sword had fallen, yet he couldn't really believe it. He realized, also, that ever since his return to New York from France there had been a warning voice within his consciousness telling him to beware. But what could Hicks Jarou do? Suppose he paid no attention to the letter? What would his tormentor do in that event? And

why should he wish to do anything? Was it because he had failed to give Jarou public recognition of his skill in curing cancer? Well, he could do that, yet—Oh, no, he couldn't for the Boyd Hunter who had been afflicted with cancer of the liver had died of it. Nothing he could say, now, would convince anyone that he, himself, was the Boyd Hunter whom they had known for years. Any attempt to convince his old friends of that would simply result in sending him to an insane asylum. What, then, was to be done? Obviously, the first step was to go to Boston and see Hicks Jarou. Perhaps he was worrying needlessly. Perhaps the man was not as unfriendly as his letter sounded. He read the letter again, and with greater care. After all, had not his own fears been responsible for the panic that had him in its grip? Yes, he would go to see Hicks Jarou. He would go at once. He would never face any of his friends again until he had seen him—discovered the worst—learned what he might expect in the future. One thing was certain, he did not want Jarou to come to New York. He did not want him to appear in his office. He did not want Stafford to meet him—nor Doris Marie either—in fact no one must know that he himself had ever met him.

He called his Japanese servant on the phone.

"Come to the club at once, George," he said; "I find that I must leave for Boston tonight. I need you to help me pack. I want to give you some written instructions concerning the work on the house."

He must not forget to write the instructions. Of course he only expected to be away perhaps thirty-six hours at the longest—but some inner monitor urged him to prepare for a somewhat longer absence.

He called Doris Marie to the phone. "Dear," he said, "I've just received an urgent call to Boston. I must go tonight."

The wail that greeted him was actually pathetic. "Oh, no Boyd, not tonight. You can't go tonight."

"I must. I hate it, but I must go. Please try to believe that I've got to go—and that I'd give half my fortune just to stay here with you."

"But Boydicum, listen. Have you forgotten that Dicky is giving a dinner party in our honor at the Ritz? Tonight, Boydicum?"

"No, I have not forgotten." Boyd actually groaned. "It will be hard to forgive me—I don't know what you can say—I don't know what he will do—"

"Do? Why he can't do anything. It is too late. You simply can't go. We can't disappoint him. We'd never be forgiven. We wouldn't deserve to be. We'd never get another invitation from anyone."

"Oh, Doris Marie, I can't be there. I really can not. Please believe that it is utterly impossible."

"Why can't you? Is it a matter of business?"

"Yes."

"And you would consider any business matter of greater importance than my wishes—now—when everything that happens is of such tremendous importance to me?"

"No, no, dear, not half so important as you—but our future happiness may depend upon this trip; I must go. I dare not ignore the summons."

"Summons from whom?"

"I can't tell you that—at least not now." Boyd realized that he never could tell, in all likelihood, and that during his absence it would be up to him to concoct a story that would be accepted by all his New York acquaintances.

"Does that mean there are secrets in your life that I am never to be told?" Doris Marie's voice was crisp.

"I thought you said you did not believe in married people feeling obliged to tell the secrets of their past—that the

partner really had no business with the life of one whom he had never known."

Boyd spoke banteringly, tried to inject a teasing tone into his voice, and hoped that Doris Marie would suddenly decide to live up to her widely circulated code of life—her code before she had decided to marry him. But evidently her intention to marry had made a marked difference in her code. She now showed herself strikingly like the mid-Victorian bride-elect, in the matter of secrets of the past.

"I see," she said angrily; "there are secrets that you are ashamed to reveal. Doubtless you are going to Boston to settle matters with the other woman."

"That is not true," replied Boyd calmly, "but even if it were, have you forgotten how scornful you have been of any girl who felt that she couldn't hold her own with any other woman?"

"That presupposes that the man has played fair—and she has been told of the other woman," was Doris Marie's quick rejoinder. "You are not playing fair. I am being kept in the dark."

"I swear that there is no other woman. You are the only one. I hate this trip and shall not know a moment's happiness until I am back here again with you. What can I say more than that? Can't you believe me, little girl? Can't you let me go feeling that you do believe me? You've been so wonderful, Doris Marie—you have made me so happy—happier than I have ever been before; can't you help me now?"

"Help you? How?" The little word, help, appealed to Doris Marie—served to lessen her irritation.

"It will be up to you to explain my absence to Dicky—make him understand, dear, that I simply had to go. Or would you rather that I called him up? I would, only I'm

so busy—I've a dozen things to do—please darling, help me out—just as you would if we were already married."

"All right. Don't worry. I'll fix things with Dicky. I'll tell you how we'll manage. Dicky shall be your proxy. He'll be giving the final bachelor dinner—except that it will be different because ladies will be included. He'll play he is the bridegroom, and I'll be the blushing bride. We'll have oodles of fun. We'll show them how to make love, and he won't make me rub the color off my lips. Don't you worry about our party, Boydicum. But remember, you'll have to tell me everything when you get back—every single thing! Now I'll have to ring off because there won't be a minute to spare. We can't make such a stupendous change in that party without a little rehearsal. Goodby, Boydicum. Come to see me the minute you get back—the very minute, mind you!"

She had hung up. That was ended. It had really not been at all difficult. Boyd was not quite sure that it had not been a little too easy. She was evidently quite intrigued with the novelty of a proxy at a prenuptial feast. Without doubt her friends would make it a very hilarious party—perhaps more hilarious because they would believe that never again would Doris Marie—their leader—be quite as jolly and carefree as she had been. Well, that was that. Now for the business of getting ready for the trip to Boston.

The Jap was busily packing. Boyd had instructed him to get his grip ready—"and you might pack my suitcase, too," he said. "I don't know exactly what I shall need. There may be something in the social line. It's just as well to be prepared for anything."

What about money? He was always fairly well supplied—but he needed more. The office was closed. His bank was closed. He must borrow. How much ought he to take? He couldn't borrow from his future father-in-law,—

at least he didn't care to try. There'd be sure to be unpleasant questions—questions that would take time—and he had no time to spare. He must have money and within the hour if he were to catch the next train to Boston. How much? He really had enough with him to buy a return ticket and pay for a night's lodging at his hotel. He could get more there if he needed it—but the inner consciousness that had seemed to direct all his movements led him to desire two thousand dollars more than he had with him. Could he get it here at his club? He would run down to the office and see.

He got the money without trouble—wrote his check and it was cashed cheerfully. He had simply explained that he had received an unexpected summons to Boston, that he should need that amount of money, and that he expected to return within thirty-six hours.

He wrote a letter to Stafford explaining his absence, and assuring the old man that he felt confident that everything about the business would be as well attended to as if he were present. It seemed rather silly to be writing this letter, when he only expected to be away thirty-six hours, and already he had arranged for an absence on his honeymoon trip of at least a month—but something within him insisted upon the letter. Then he wrote a brief note to Palmer telling of his unexpected summons to Boston—nothing alarming—he'd explain upon his return—but he hoped Mr. Palmer would help Doris Marie to understand that sometimes such things were necessary in the life of a business man—and he was really writing this appeal to his solicitor who, happily, was also the father of the girl he was to marry.

Boyd Hunter caught the train to Boston which he had planned to take. He knew it was the train that Hicks Jarou would expect him to take. Would the man be at the station to meet him? What did the next few hours have in

store for him? A shiver of apprehension ran through his body. He was afraid—afraid—and he did not know why. He would have jumped off at a way station—cut and run—had he dared to. If Hicks Jarou were like anyone else—but he was not like anyone else. He had never met a man like him. It was impossible to guess what he would do. Boyd was so shaken with fear that it made him actually ill—and yet he knew he must go on—keep the engagement—face what was in store for him—live his miserable life to the end—for he was not one who could contemplate suicide as a way out.

CHAPTER XV.

Thirty-six hours had passed, and Boyd Hunter had not returned. Stafford was anxious, principally because he had not been told the nature of the business that had called Boyd away so suddenly. He thought he should have been told. He feared the young fellow would take the bits in his teeth—run away with some new idea without consulting the men who knew more about his father's business than he could ever know. The longer Boyd remained away the more uneasy Stafford became.

Another day and a half, and still Boyd had not returned. No word had been received from him. Doris Marie was justly indignant. He might at least have found time to telegraph. She told her father so, and added that all men were alike, in a manner quite withering. She declared that no business could be so absorbing as to prevent a man from writing out a brief telegram, and that the situation demanded the help of a parent of ability. Her father agreed with her. He was puzzled and more than a little alarmed. He conferred with Stafford. Together, they thought of many reasons why Boyd might be keeping silence—reasons not altogether to his credit, but they couldn't actually accept any of them. They waited another day, and then consulted the chief of a private detective bureau.

"I really haven't worried very much," Stafford admitted; "I've been very busy—and when a man is getting ready to be married—wouldn't there be things to attend to that might take him away? I've never been married—I don't know—" He spoke vaguely, and the chief smiled.

"I fancy," he replied, "that most modern young men would find it necessary to mend a few fences—"

"Boyd was an exemplary young chap," interrupted Stafford hastily— "exactly like his father who was one of the most honorable of men."

"Don't put him in the past tense," said the detective, genially. "I have no doubt that he is still a most exemplary young man. We mustn't forget that a young man of today has problems that his father would never have run up against."

"He said he'd be back in thirty-six hours—that is what he told me, at any rate," supplied Mr. Palmer, "and he told my daughter so, too."

"That is what he told me," added Stafford; "but I made allowances—I am not worrying—I feel that everything is all right—really—"

"If you aren't at all anxious," interrupted Palmer, "why did you let me send for the chief? There's no reason why Boyd could not have written or telegraphed to some of us. You can't think of any reason, can you?"

Stafford couldn't.

"His business is all right, isn't it," asked the detective; "nothing to worry about there?"

"Nothing at all," replied Stafford with emphasis. "His business was never in better shape. It pays a most gratifying dividend."

"Has he ever told you of any other worries—anything of a personal nature—anything pertaining to his life before he met his father?"

"Not a thing. He was—is—a close-mouthed chap."

"What I have noticed about him," pursued Mr. Palmer, "is that he didn't—doesn't like to be questioned concerning his past life. Did he never tell you anything about that?"

"Not one word, if he could help it—and he generally could. I soon learned not to ask questions. He'd get unreasonably irritated even over the most casual question

about how he had lived, where he went to school—little things like that.”

“M-m-m,” murmured the detective, and he wrote something in his note book that he kept to himself.

“I suppose,” said Mr. Palmer, tentatively, “that we can’t absolutely discount the possibility of another woman?”

“It would be in keeping with the young of his generation,” interjected the detective with a little secret smile that angered Stafford.

“Then you think it may be that?” asked Palmer, quickly, and anxiously. He was thinking of Doris Marie.

“No,” exploded Stafford, “it is not that. I can’t believe—I won’t believe—that the son of old Boyd Hunter could do anything that was not strictly honorable. I tell you, the young fellow was as like his father as two peas in a pod, and I knew old Boyd Hunter from the heart out.”

“But it might be a case of blackmail—he really might not be so very much to blame—” interrupted the detective, gently—“and he did raise two thousand dollars—”

“What would that amount to if it were a case of blackmail,” asked Stafford with sarcasm.

“It might act as a sop—” said Palmer, thoughtfully.

“But in that case he’d have been drawing on his account for a larger sum long before this,” replied Stafford. “It isn’t a case of blackmail.”

“He might have been unduly intimate with some girl—she might be in trouble,” said the detective, easily. “Two thousand dollars would see her through—”

“He has been here five months; she could have found out her condition before this—and she must have known his address.” Mr. Palmer was offering reasons why the detective could not be right. “His firm is pretty well known,—he’d have been sent for before this—”

“She might have known him under some other name,” said the detective.

"That is true," admitted Palmer, grudgingly.

"I can't and won't believe there's anything in that," said Stafford, explosively. "I tell you, I knew his father. I knew all he went through after his wife ran away. There were never any women in his life. He was absolutely decent. I don't believe he could have a son who would shame him in any such way. And if the boy had been led astray because he had had no father to train him, he would have made everything right before he came here to take his father's place. His father would have questioned him, before sending him here—found out all there was to know about him. I have every proof that the old man did everything possible to train his son to take his place. He would never have sent him here if he had thought the boy would disgrace him."

The detective arose, looking rather bored. One couldn't put much confidence in statements coming from a friend who out-Damoned old Damon himself.

"Well," he said, "I guess I've got all the facts—all that you can give me, anyhow. I'll keep the matter in mind—and let you know if anything turns up. Good morning."

"You're sure that man will keep still about it?" asked Stafford, anxiously. "It would be bad for the business if he—if he made a public scandal of—of anything—"

"It would be hard on my daughter," replied Palmer. "I made him promise—I think he is to be trusted—"

"Mind you, I don't believe there can be anything of a scandalous nature. I meant every word I said about Boyd to that old busy body—"

"And he didn't believe any of it," interrupted Palmer. "He's going to work this out in his own way—but I'm sure we'll be first to hear what he finds out."

"If so—and it's bad—we must find a way to protect the business—"

"We must find a way to protect Doris Marie," interrupted Mr. Palmer, savagely.

Stafford's opinion, expressed so emphatically, and his absolute belief in Boyd Hunter's integrity, had great weight with the old friends of Boyd Hunter, senior. That left but one theory that they could accept, and this soon became unanimous. There had been foul play. They declared that detectives must be summoned—the best the city afforded, and then it became known that already the two men most interested were in communication with the best detectives that the city of Boston boasted.

What looked at first like a simple problem increased as clue after clue yielded no information. It soon reached a point where it could no longer be kept a secret among Boyd's friends. The newspapers took up the hunt, and readers who thrived on excitement turned first to the columns that treated of the mysterious disappearance of the man they described as the popular young business man who was so soon to have been married to one of New York's most beautiful, most charming, and best known society debutantes.

Doris Marie saw her loveliest portrait spoiled by reproduction in all the leading papers, and angrily wondered how anyone dared—while her mother, who had supplied the photograph that Doris Marie had selected kept a discreet silence. They were both getting a certain enjoyment out of the publicity—and considerable satisfaction in their opportunity for openly expressed indignation.

It was learned that Boyd had not gone to the hotel in Boston that he had expected to patronize. His signature was not found on any hotel register in Boston—and the detectives had visited even the rather disreputable hostleries that they knew he would not enter, but without getting a clue to his disappearance. If he had spent the night in Boston, it must have been at the house of some friend. But

whom did he know? He had never mentioned having any friend in Boston. He had only gone to Boston once since he came to take his father's place, and that was on business for the firm, and he had put up at the hotel his father had always patronized. Old Mr. Hunter had no personal friends in Boston. He had never gone to Boston except on urgent business.

Finally a newspaper man declared that he believed he had some information that might help. The porter on the train Boyd had taken remembered the young man very well. He said he had been met by an elderly man of singular appearance who had a red-cap boy in attendance, and that Boyd's suit case was carried to a taxi that was evidently in waiting. The two men drove off together.

Who was the elderly man? What made the porter speak of his appearance as "singular"? The porter couldn't say "jus zactly—" but he "suttinly didn't look jis like other folks."

After much questioning the following description was put together and made a part of the records in the case:

A man not much above medium height with hands and feet rather too small and a head a little too large for his body—dark, melancholy eyes in which a strange light would suddenly appear and as suddenly die down—and a shock of beautiful white curly hair that didn't really agree with the otherwise youthful appearance of the man, who walked briskly and gracefully, and had the commanding air of one who kept his place at the head of things. "Must of been a Cunnel," said the porter—"a Cunnel—or mebbe a Gen'ral."

"Sounds to me," said Joe-Anne, "like a good description of the man we saw in Central Park, one New Year's day. Don't you remember, Doris Marie? The man who told our fortunes?"

Doris Marie remembered, "but saw no reason for trying to connect that faker with Boyd's disappearance. That was long before Boyd's arrival; of course they had never met. And Boyd wouldn't run away with a tramp like that, anyhow."

"He said he was a scientist," Joe-Anne reminded her. "Didn't he say he was interested in biology?"

"I don't remember— haven't given him a thought in ages."

"What was his name?" persisted Joe-Anne. "I can almost speak it—"

"Something outlandish," replied Doris Marie—"probably he invented it on the spot. I think he was like that. Nothing he told us came to pass."

"There's time enough yet," said Joe-Anne. "If Boyd never returns you may yet meet up with the man old enough to be your father."

"Joe-Anne, you promised never to speak of that again."

"I didn't either. I said I wouldn't except under great provocation. Suppose that man has kept track of you, and doesn't want you to marry Boyd, and so lured Boyd away—"

"Joe-Anne, I won't listen to such nonsense."

"All right; you don't have to—but what a corking good story one could get up."

And thus one good clue to Boyd's disappearance was consigned to oblivion.

Weeks passed into months, and the months became a year, and nothing more was learned of the disappearance of Boyd Hunter. He had dropped completely from his little world, and the general opinion was that he had been killed—possibly for the two thousand dollars he had taken away with him. But how had his murder been accom-

plished? How could it have been covered up so successfully?

Doris Marie could not be convinced that Boyd would not return. She insisted on going on with the work of reconstructing the house just as they had planned. She knew he would be very happy to find it all ready for them to begin housekeeping. Her father and old Stafford saw no good reason for refusing her the comfort she found in this work. There was money enough to meet all expenses. They knew that Doris Marie had made the plans and that Boyd had intended to let her carry them out—and if it comforted the poor child—as it quite evidently did—

The house was finished at last—even to the wonderful nursery on the third story where ample accommodations had been provided for four children, and where five might be cared for! Doris Marie wanted to take possession—but was finally persuaded that such a move would not do at all. Her parents might have been cajoled and intimidated—that had frequently happened when they sought to control their daughter, and Doris Marie would quite likely have succeeded in getting their consent to her plans—but Stafford could not be moved. He was adamant. He paid the bills, and carried the keys to the finished house. It would not be occupied while he lived, unless Boyd came to take possession, or sent word that some one else might occupy it. A silly girl's hysterics did not disturb him in the least. Doris Marie had found her master in old Stafford, and she hated him. She told him that she would see to it that he was discharged the very minute Boyd got back, but that didn't seem to worry him much. He smiled and kept the keys to the house. He was really happier than he had been in months, and he began to regain some of the weight he had lost since the arrival on the scene of his old friend's son. He couldn't account for it, and did not attempt to in public, but to himself he said that he felt as if a

spook that had been sitting on his chest, had now taken its departure.

Stafford paid scrupulous attention to the business. It took quite a stride forward during the first months of Boyd's absence, and his bank account was larger than it had ever been. It would prove to the young fellow upon his return, that he could leave the business any length of time without worrying about it—unless old Stafford should die.

The detectives who had been employed to solve the mystery of Boyd's disappearance gradually wearied of the job, or were discharged, and only the chief was left. He kept the matter in mind, quite comfortably, but had practically dismissed it as one of the mysteries that never could be solved. There was no one to keep his interest alive, for as time passed it appeared that no one seemed to care much as to what had happened to Boyd Hunter. He had not become enough of a citizen during his short stay in New York to count with the older generation, and the younger generation had always considered him something of a sissy—also too good-looking, and too well off financially, and too much of a preacher, and too inhumanly good to be more than tolerated. They were frankly pleased that he had disappeared, and they could go on with their senseless round of pleasure-seeking without having to drag along an old-fashioned lummoX like Boyd Hunter.

Even Doris Marie ceased to expect him back. She decided that he had been killed for the two thousand dollars—that his body would never be found—that his murderers would never be known—that, if alive, he had forfeited her love and she should never forgive him—and that it was high time she began playing the game of love with some one else. She went back to Dicky—who protested valiantly and was beaten, and who said, publicly and plaintively, that

he was quite done for unless some one came who could interest Doris Marie more than he did and take her off his hands. He frequently told the bunch when they were at some party, that he'd always nourish a tender sentiment for Boyd Hunter for having given him a little rest from Doris Marie. And Doris Marie grinned comfortably, and no one took him seriously except Joe-Anne, who seemed to understand, and to whom he made a practice of confiding all his troubles.

"But it looks to me so very silly," she said one day when they were discussing the situation. "I can't see any good reason why you should run about with Doris Marie so devotedly, if you don't enjoy it."

"I'm not running about with her at all devotedly—and I do not enjoy it," replied Dicky.

"People say you'll soon be engaged to her—if you don't watch out."

"I've been going with her because I'm sorry for the poor kid—to be jilted just when she thought her plans were going to materialize—"

"Jilted! Do you really think that—but of course you don't."

"Down in the bottom of my heart, I believe I do; but this is just between you and me, you understand. I've seen those two together enough to know that Boyd Hunter didn't love her—"

"Nor did Doris Marie love him," interrupted Joe-Anne. "They don't believe in love. They said so."

"I've said so, too," rejoined Dicky; "but just the same I'll never marry until I think I'm in love."

"That's the way I feel about it," confessed Joe-Anne. "And Doris Marie tells me over and over that it is the big reason why I'll never be married. What shall you do, Dicky, when Doris Marie gets ready to announce her engagement to you?"

"She won't do that; she wouldn't dare."

"I wouldn't be too sure, if I were you. Doris Marie dares do whatever she wants to do—and she means to marry."

"If she should do a thing like that to me, I'd—I'd—well, I'd do exactly as Boyd Hunter did—cut and run."

"You wouldn't marry her?"

"Not on your life, I wouldn't," replied Dicky with conviction. "I'll help her through the worst of this trouble," he added—"that is, if she'll behave herself; but I may as well tell you that I've gone just about as far in my character of comforting angel as I mean to go. What you have just said about it frightens me. Knowing Doris Marie as I do, I'd not like the job of shaking her if she decided to marry me."

"She wouldn't do it under ordinary circumstances," said Joe-Anne. "I don't believe she wants to marry you—I really do not believe she cares very much about being engaged to you—but she can't bear to have anyone think she has been jilted. And if you think that, others must think so, too—and Doris Marie would be just shrewd enough to suspect it. She wouldn't like that; she'd fight against it, and she wouldn't know of any better way than to annex you."

"It's little Dicky for the tall timber," replied that young man, "so tell me—shall I make the separation immediate, or invite her once or twice more—"

"Isn't that for you to say?" asked Joe-Anne. "I'm not telling your fortune, you know."

"You're being a darned loyal little friend," replied Dicky, "and I shan't forget it. I've been all kinds of a silly ass to think I could help Doris Marie by playing around with her, and I might have given the bunch a chance to say that I had jilted her."

Joe-Anne made no response to this, although the thought came into her mind that perhaps that might be said anyhow, and she was sorry she had warned Dicky. That is, she was a little sorry—but not as much so as a friend should be. A lovely light was burning in her eyes, her cheeks were like wild roses, and a happy smile played with the dimples at the corners of her mouth. She was looking unusually attractive, and Dicky chanced to observe her at exactly the right moment. He was impressed. Afterward, he recalled her expression and wondered why he had never before noticed how really attractive Joe-Anne was. He had considered her a most desirable friend and confidante ever since he had known her, and now he suddenly realized that she was something more than that. One night he awoke from a sound sleep, saying to himself, “By gosh, I believe she looked like that—sweet and desirable and all fluttery because I had said I did not intend to marry Doris Marie. I wonder!”

And during the next fortnight he wondered rather frequently and decided that he was wise not to be seen with Doris Marie any more, because to do so might hurt Joe-Anne.

Meanwhile, Doris Marie was showing temper. Why hadn't he been over to see her? There had been several affairs to which he should have taken her. Where was he every time she called at his studio? The janitor told her that he had not been in his studio for two weeks; where was he spending his time? And why had he not given her his new address? She asked all these questions in a very spicy letter that she sent to his club, and added that she was most anxious to go to the Friday evening dance—and if she couldn't depend on him to take her, didn't he think it would be the manly thing to do to tell her so, and give her time to make other arrangements? But Dicky did not get her letter until it was fully a week old.

He was camping in the Adirondacks—but no one knew just where.

Doris Marie waited a reasonable length of time for a reply to her letter, then called up the club and learned that Dicky had not been seen there in a long time. Then she called up Bert Baldwin and asked him if he'd help her out of a dilemma by taking her to the Friday night dance. "I'll explain when I see you," she informed him, and he had replied that he was glad indeed to have the honor of appearing as her escort. After arranging that, Doris Marie called up Joe-Anne, hoping to make an appointment for an immediate conference. But Joe-Anne was not at home—hadn't been for a fortnight. Further questioning brought out the fact from the hesitating lips of a perplexed mother that she feared Joe-Anne was married.

"Married!" almost screamed Doris Marie.

"I suppose she is," said the mother; "in fact, I've just this moment got a note from her to that effect."

"You told me she was going out of town to visit friends," said Doris Marie reproachfully.

"That is what she told me," replied the mother. "But she seems to have gone to some parson's house with Dicky Graham—"

"Dicky Graham!"

"Yes; didn't I tell you? She and Dicky eloped and are married and I've just been told, and I don't know where they are going to live or how—and they don't seem to care. She writes that they are so much in love that—"

But Doris Marie had hung up. She didn't care to hear any more. "Married," she said—"Joe-Anne and Dicky. Eloped. In love. Heavens, I'd better kneel down and give thanks that I had the nerve to ask Bert Baldwin to take me to the Friday night dance."

The weeks and months made up a full year, and Boyd Hunter had not returned. Nothing had been heard from

him. He had sent for no money. Stafford now declared that it was a case of amnesia, a trouble that was becoming very common. He was confident that Boyd would suddenly and quite miraculously be restored, one of these days, and return to New York. When he did he would find his business all straight and very prosperous. His old home remained empty with the exception of the Jap, who cared for it as Boyd had told him to before he went on his mysterious journey, and devoutly thanked his honorable ancestors for having provided so comfortable a berth for their unworthy descendant.

CHAPTER XVI.

"I am not particularly pleased to meet you," said Hicks Jarou as Boyd stepped from the train, "although I am really glad to see you. Sounds ambiguous, doesn't it? As an advertisement of my ability you could not be surpassed."

He looked his former patient over, critically, as he spoke, and while his expressive eyes told of his gratification as a healer they also evinced a contempt for Boyd, the man, that our friend found exceedingly galling. It had the effect of arousing in him a feeling of irritation that helped to make him far less pliable than he had been on that day, nearly two years ago, when they had first met in Central Park.

"Advertisement!" he snorted; "advertisement be damned. Have you summoned me here because I have failed to advertise you?"

"No, not for that," was the grave response, "although you do seem to remember that you gave your promise to let others know how you had been helped."

"You know very well, if you know anything at all about me, that I couldn't do that without giving myself away," replied Boyd, angrily. "You knew I didn't realize what was to happen when I told you to go on with your devilish plans—the damnable scheme that was to ruin my life. You must have known what a hellish scrape you were wishing on me. What did you expect me to do under such conditions?"

"Really not quite all you promised," replied Hicks Jarou, softly, then added with an amused smile, "you omitted infernal from your list of hellish adjectives; but never mind! I have learned, Mr. Hunter, that one who has been greatly helped seldom likes to give value received when once he thinks himself well out of the woods; but I really did have

faith in you; you seemed rather more dependable than the ordinary run of men—”

“You placed me in such a damnable position.”

“You might have used infernal there.”

“You are pleased to joke—but I’ve suffered.”

“More than was necessary, my friend; much more than was necessary.”

“How do you know?”

“I know that you chose the path of Deceit which always brings more suffering than the path of Truth.”

“Are you referring to my failure to advertise you?”

“I’m referring to your entire course of conduct. Of course I feel it that you failed me so utterly. I had really believed in your protestations of gratitude, because I knew that I had earned gratitude. Why, had it not been for me, you would not be living today. You are not unmindful of that fact.”

“You evidently have no conception of what you have made me suffer,” said Boyd, who suddenly realized that he was really indebted to this man for his life, and that he had quite forgotten that he owed him anything. Now he felt that he must make Jarou see that there was something to be said on his side of the question.

“You have suffered—perhaps,” rejoined Jarou scornfully, “but others have died whom you might have saved. You can have no idea of the number of lives you might have saved—and didn’t.”

“I?” interrupted Boyd—“I haven’t failed to save anyone’s life. That is poppycock!” But his voice was not convincing. His conscience troubled him.

“Your old friend, Hugh Jackson, has just died from cancer of the liver,” Jarou reminded him. “You thought, when you first heard of his trouble, that you ought to tell him of your experience—but you didn’t do it. You allowed him to die. And you can’t have forgotten Mrs. Craddock—or

the colored janitor in your office building, who is now in the hospital—”

“I am not here,” interrupted Boyd, violently, “to be told what I ought to have done. That is none of your business. I have not appointed you my father confessor. I am here to learn what you have to tell me, and what you propose doing. And I have no time to waste. Why did you send for me?”

“Principally,” replied Jarou, softly, and seemingly in no way irritated by Boyd’s violence, “because I have been reading the newspaper accounts of your coming marriage.”

“Well, what about it?” demanded Boyd roughly. “In what way does my coming marriage concern you?”

“My dear fellow, you can’t be so very much surprised as I know you will wish to appear, when I tell you that you are not free to marry, because you already have a wife.”

“I already have—” stuttered Boyd, “that is not true. My wife is dead. You—you—are trying to blackmail me. You are making more trouble for me—you—you detestable scoundrel. I’d like to kill you.”

Boyd really did not know what he was saying. Jarou realized his condition and almost pitied him. He could see that his patient had been tried beyond his endurance and decided to deal more gently with him than had been his intention when he first saw him.

“Don’t let yourself get so excited,” he said, “you’ll burst a blood vessel. I, as your physician, warn you.”

“Why can’t you let me alone,” demanded Boyd, miserably. “Haven’t I suffered enough?”

“Listen!” The voice was really soothing now, and the man’s manner had become sympathetic. “You must try to believe that I never meant to harm you. You must try to believe that I honestly tried to help you. To cure a man who was doomed to die—but we won’t refer to that again, since it seems to irritate you. I still believe I did well by

you. All I ask now, is that you should try to believe that I am once more acting as seems to me right. Under the circumstances, I really do not see how I could do differently—and you must realize that this is less embarrassing than it might have been had I gone to you instead of asking you to come here.”

“Well, go ahead. I’m listening,” Boyd was really impressed by the man’s reasonableness.

“You will admit,” Jarou said, quietly, “that you have never been notified of the death of your wife.”

“I have never heard from her at all,” replied Boyd, desperately. “Naturally, I believed—who wouldn’t after all the long years of silence—oh, how could anyone have treated me so cruelly! But after all these years, death may be assumed—legally she is dead—legally I am free to marry again—you know that—”

“Your wife still lives. When you know she still lives could you so wrong an innocent young girl—”

“I do not know she still lives. I have only your word for it.”

“You will soon see her. She has not changed beyond recognition, as you will admit—”

“I do not want to see her—ever again. She ruined my life—”

“We all make mistakes. But I am not here to plead for her. I am thinking of little Doris Marie, who has many years to live and who doesn’t know what is best for her, or what she wants, or what she really thinks about you. Compared with you, she is just a baby. Are you going to take advantage of her ignorance? Do you think you will find happiness that way?”

“What I mean to do is no concern of yours,” replied Boyd angrily. “I do not believe in your sudden anxiety for the welfare of Doris Marie. Had you really been interested, why did you not interfere before matters had gone

so far? You seem to have ways of finding out what you want to know."

"I really did not believe you'd go so far," replied Jarou; "neither did your wife. Your actions are not in line with the man we know you to be. You are really past your seventieth birthday, you know."

"And who would believe it? Even if I told it, who would believe me? Oh, I could strangle you! Here and now. Gladly! For you're driving me to desperation."

"How would it help, to strangle me? Think of your own actions in this matter. Think honestly. You were given a certain problem; you did not try to find the best way out—but the easiest way. You'll admit that if you're honest with yourself. You concocted an elaborate lie instead of admitting the truth—a truth that might have subjected you to some ridicule, but which would have been a boon to suffering humanity. You thought you had chosen the easiest way—but has it proven to be easy? Really the truth would have been less difficult. A man grows morally and mentally by surmounting difficulties. You have become a thing that you can't respect yourself."

By this time they had reached a quiet little hotel where Hicks Jarou had found accommodation.

"If you will come to my apartments—" Jarou said, in a tone of invitation; then noticing Boyd's hesitation—"it will be the wisest thing you can do, I assure you. You are faced with a problem—better learn all you can about it before making your decision."

Boyd nodded, and followed his host. The little sitting room was neatly but sparsely furnished—not in any way attractive, and not the sort of room that one would have expected a man like Jarou to select. Boyd remembered the elegantly appointed rooms he had occupied in France—but made no comment. He had no wish to discuss anything not pertinent to his present difficulty. He felt that

the sooner he had heard what Jarou expected to do to him the better; then he'd know how to fight for his happiness—for his right to live his own life as best he could under the circumstances that he believed had been forced upon him.

"Be seated," said Jarou hospitably; "I remember that you do not smoke; what can I do for you? Have you learned to drink? I can get champagne—or—what would you prefer?"

"Nothing," replied Boyd, gruffly; "nothing from you. Why pretend? You are not speaking to one whom you consider a friend—nor am I. Let's get down to business."

"May I remind you that your manner is needlessly belligerent?" asked Jarou, mildly. "Nothing is gained by inviting animosity. After all, you know, I really did save your life—you see, we can't go on without referring to that! I did save your life—"

"It would have been better for me had you let me alone."

"You do not believe that. You love life. You do not want to die even now, when you have found living somewhat more difficult than you like. You have asked me, 'why pretend?' Now I ask you, 'why pretend?' You know very well that you are glad to be alive. You know very well that if I were to speak the word that would put you back in your old condition—facing death from cancer—you would get down on your knees and beg me to save you. Be honest with yourself and me."

"But this regeneration—with all the difficulties it brought me," faltered Boyd, "you must have known—"

"Oh, for Heaven's sake, stop whining. Life is full of difficulties that we can't know how to meet until they present themselves. We learn by meeting them. As I have already reminded you, they strengthen character. If we meet them bravely, they make better men of us. If we look for easy ways out, they weaken us and we whine—as you are doing now. Now let me ask you this: Do you really long to lose

that fine crop of hair? Do you really long for the evidences of age from which I rescued you? You know you do not. You want to keep all the blessings of your present condition, but you do not want to pay for them. If you had met the situation honestly, in the first place—”

“Well, it appears that I did not,” interrupted Boyd, curtly, “and so have merited your disapproval. But let me tell you, I do not care that,” snapping his fingers, “what you think of me. And I do not admit that you have any right to tell me what I should or should not do. I’ve no more time to waste. I have the honor to wish you good-morning.”

Boyd arose, as he said this, and was on the point of leaving the room when the door opened, and a lady entered. A tall lady, rather too thin for beauty, with gray hair plainly combed into a knot loosely confined at the base of the brain—exactly as she had worn it forty years ago. She was upright and walked briskly and lightly across the floor. She held her hands out in welcome, and Boyd noticed that they were still beautiful, although they were the hands of an old woman. He knew that she was sixty-eight years old, and saw that although she was a well preserved woman, she looked her age. He could not feel that she had ever belonged to him. He recalled their brief home life—and his suffering—and he hated her. In a trice his mind was made up. He knew what he meant to do. No one could blame him for doing it. This woman meant nothing to him. She had cared nothing for him. She had no claim on him now. She should not come into his life again and bring him further misery. He meant to fight for his right to a home—for a wife—happiness. He would carry out his carefully made plans in spite of them both. What could they do when he stood pat?

“Why, how do you do, Mother,” he said, taking her hand, and giving her cheek a good imitation of a kiss. “This is a

great surprise. A very great surprise. You know, my father assured me that you were dead, and I believed it."

It is quite possible that never before in his long and remarkable career had Hicks Jarou been so deeply astonished as to be stunned into silence. Now, he simply stared—incredulous. He could not think of a word to help the aged woman who stood before Boyd Hunter looking quite as petrified with amazement, as he himself felt.

"Why, Boyd," she finally gasped, "I—I do not—understand—"

"You are my mother," said Boyd firmly, "the mother who ran away from my father, the mother whom I thought was dead. You deserted me soon after my birth—left me to make my way alone in the world—" He actually succeeded in sounding scornful and almost convincing.

"But you are not my son—it is ridiculous—you—you can't make anyone believe—such—such an outrageous—lie as that."

"I have a much better chance to make anyone believe anything I may say, than you have to convince them I'm lying," replied Boyd, sternly. He was too angry to be sorry for this woman whom he had once loved and who had made him suffer for so many years. Now he was fighting for his future happiness. His back was to the wall. He hadn't much hope—but he'd fight to the end. So he thought.

"I shall swear that you are my husband—"

"Who will believe you—seeing us together? You look old enough to be my mother. And when I declare that you are my poor old mother—slightly demented—you can guess which one of us is most likely to be believed."

"You have evidently forgotten me," interposed Hicks Jarou. "I can add to your wife's testimony an account of what I did to rejuvenate you—"

"Yes," asked Boyd, with cruel cynicism, "and who will believe you, when I swear that it is a lie? How many other patients have you who will come forward to support your story? Rejuvenation is a matter of experiment among the scientists of today. Some quite remarkable things have been done—but can you name one man among all those who are experimenting who would accept the story you would tell them about me? They would laugh at you. They would say it couldn't be done. They would say you were a candidate for the lunatic asylum. And you'd find that unpleasant opinion equally strong should you tell them about curing cancer of the liver. No one would believe you. Doctors are not ready to accept your methods. They'd be glad to see you safely locked away, and I'd give them my most cordial assistance."

"I really think you are right about that," replied Hicks Jarou, genially. "I refer to what the doctors would say."

"I know I am right about it. That's where I win—in this controversy. I am determined that you shall not spoil my life—not absolutely, at any rate."

"Then you mean," asked Mrs. Hunter, "to stand by your absurd story?"

"So far as I can see, there is nothing left for me to do except to stand by it. Unless I commit suicide—and I've decided against that."

"But if I go home—call upon the old friends—they will remember me—"

"Undoubtedly. Go back—if you wish. I shall introduce you as my mother. If you try to convince them that you are my wife, I shall take you before a commission in lunacy—I am not without influence as you will learn. I am recognized as the son of my father—and he is remembered as a man of honor. In spite of your attempt to wreck his life—my life—Boyd Hunter earned the respect of all who knew him."

"But how does that affect you—now that you call yourself Boyd Hunter's son?"

"Boyd Hunter prepared for this emergency very carefully. He wrote letters to his lawyer—to his old secretary also—preparing the way for his son. Those letters will have greater weight than anything you—the wife who deserted her husband—can possibly say."

"I'm not so sure of that. Our old friends have not heard my story."

"It comes too late to be effective. They all know that your husband lived an exemplary life after you ran away. If you return I have only to say that both he and I believed you to be dead—that you disappeared a second time, leaving your little son—"

"You would dare treat me like that. You would!"

"Why not? I owe you nothing. Think how you have treated me. So far as I am concerned, you died many years ago. But,—if you care to acknowledge yourself as my mother, I will support you comfortably—but not in America."

"Thank you, Boyd," was the quiet response; "I am abundantly able to support myself. And you cannot dictate terms to me."

"Nor can you dictate terms to me," replied Boyd hotly, "If you attempt it—with the help of your very good friend, here, let me warn you that I shall put up a pretty vigorous fight."

"But about that young girl, Boyd—let's consider her—calmly—"

"She is a part of my life that does not concern you. In other and plainer words, it is none of your damned business."

"Suppose your wife decided to apply for a divorce?" suggested Hicks Jarou.

"On what grounds? Even if I proclaimed myself the husband she deserted, she'd find it difficult to procure an attorney. I lived a decent life all those years after she left me—those

lonely, lonely years—she has no grounds for divorce. And as things are now—well, you can see for yourself it would only mean the insane asylum for her if she interferes with me, now. I hope I'll not be forced to take that step."

Hicks Jarou looked nonplussed. The interview had not run along the lines he had expected it to. Boyd's behavior since his rejuvenation had not been such that anyone could have foretold resistance so vigorous and unexpected—unless one had made a study of the worms that had been known to turn.

"Well," sighed Mrs. Hunter, "it looks as if efforts to prevent what seems to me a great wrong have been useless."

"Belated efforts," sneered Boyd. "Your very wise friend," with a scornful glance at Hicks Jarou, "should have warned you of their inefficiency. You are thirty years too late to hope to influence my life."

"You always did do as you pleased without regard to the wishes or preferences or rights of anyone else," retorted his wife. "I should have remembered that—I did, really—but I hoped time might have softened you—made you more just—"

"I think we need not continue this conversation," interrupted Boyd coldly. He went to the door, then turned to face Jarou. "The charming interview is concluded, is it not?" he asked, with biting sarcasm.

"For the present," replied Jarou, bowing very low. "I bid you farewell, and hope your journey home may be to your liking."

There was a tone in the silky voice, an expression in the sardonic eyes, that sent cold chills down Boyd's spine. He felt a premonition of disaster—but he would not heed it. He had scored. They had tried to ruin his plans, and he had proven to them that they could not do it. He marvelled at the facility he had shown in meeting their unexpected attack—how had he happened to think of all the arguments he had used to convince them that he would not allow them to influence him—arguments that they simply could not ignore?

When Boyd left the hotel he felt almost as if he were walking on air. He had scored. Why shouldn't he feel well satisfied with himself? He had given both of his tormentors exactly what they deserved. He had been ruthless—and that pleased him. They had seen that he was not to be trifled with. Then he recalled his manner of leaving—nothing cut-and-run about it—a dignified exit. He had nodded curtly to them both before leaving the room, and that was all. He had not deigned to look back, even after he left the hotel. And so he did not know that Hicks Jarou had also nodded—but not to him—and that a little dark man whom he had not seen in the room was following him—following as silently as his shadow.

Boyd walked slowly, debating his next move. He could not return to New York—not just yet. He had to think things out—alone and uninterrupted. And he had no wish to go to any hotel where he might be recognized. He sought and found a little place as obscure as that which housed his wife and Hicks Jarou, and registered under an assumed name. He went to his room, threw himself into the easiest chair the room afforded, and set himself to solve the toughest problem he had ever encountered.

What was he to do? He couldn't sue for divorce without revealing all he had worked so strenuously to conceal. He couldn't marry Doris Marie without getting a divorce. Notwithstanding his brave talk about his wife being dead to him—dead legally—he knew he couldn't marry again without a divorce. He wasn't that kind of a man. He prided himself on being absolutely law-abiding. Evidently Mary, his wife, had remembered that and counted on it. Well, he was glad he had disappointed her. Whatever he decided to do about Doris Marie, he would do without their advice, encouragement or assistance.

Now about Doris Marie—and their plans for the future? Should he tell her? Or should he keep his secret—run away for a year or two until she made other arrangements—cut and run; cut and run! Would she stand by him when his duplicity had been made public? Would she care to have anything more to do with him? He didn't believe she would.

Could he go back and reveal the truth? If he had only told the truth in the first place it would have been easier. He was sure he couldn't do so now. But he must. There was no other way. He must go back—his business was there—the only thing he had to live for, now. He must go back, break off his engagement with Doris Marie—endure all the hard things that would be said of him as a consequence. He would become a recluse in so far as society was concerned, giving himself strictly to his business. He didn't care a damn what anyone said about him. He'd go back—and he'd discharge Stafford—and he'd close all but three of the rooms in his remodelled house, and he'd live in those rooms with the Jap—and that was that. Should he take the night train to New York? There was still time to make it.

The one bell boy the little hotel afforded brought in a note. It was from Hicks Jarou. How did the man know where he was staying? How did he guess the assumed name under which he had registered?

"If you leave Boston without seeing me again," he read, "all the morning papers will carry the following news item: Mr. Boyd Hunter of New York, who came to Boston to meet the wife from whom he has been estranged for many years, returned to New York today."

That was all. It was enough. Boyd decided to postpone his departure until a later date. He would not take the night train to New York.

CHAPTER XVII.

"I don't like your plan a little bit." Mrs. Hunter's voice was decisive—her eyes and mouth more so. "I don't like it at all," she continued. "I never have been able to believe that anyone has a right to interfere in another's life."

"Your reason?" asked Hicks Jarou, lazily. He was smiling inscrutably, yet politely, and he did not appear at all affronted by the emphatic manner in which Mrs. Hunter was denouncing his plan.

"No one can say," replied Mrs. Hunter, energetically, "what another person was sent into this world to do—yet we are always judging and always preaching and always trying to use influence to change another's plans—"

"And always interfering one way or another," added Hicks Jarou. "Can you tell me how humanity can avoid that? Now you have the best of ideas on this subject, and you are a very earnest woman—yet you interfered with your husband's life most decisively when you left him. Please hear me out," as Mrs. Hunter sought to defend her action; "I know that your act in leaving him changed his life very materially, and it did not make a better man of him. He became a cynic. Many of his old neighbors declare that you ruined his life in so far as any hope of happiness is concerned. They say he never again acted like a man who knew the meaning of the word. He simply couldn't find any way to build up even a makeshift home life for himself, and he went on living a life that was the merest existence in the old home. You left him because you believed such a move was necessary to your happiness. You did not think what it would mean to him. You were thinking only of yourself. Boyd is now thinking only of himself. He is hoping he may have a few years of happiness before he dies. Our interview with him today has effected further change—"

greater than he realizes—and so, you see, you and I have interfered again. Between us he has had a rather raw deal.”

“Poor Boyd. Of course I did not realize, when I left him—in fact, I really believed that he’d not miss me very greatly. I can’t believe, even after hearing what you say, that he did miss me. Boyd was always quite sufficient unto himself. He probably gave me all he had to give any woman, but he was a hard man to live with. But I hate the thought that I must spoil his life—and yet—”

“You believed he should know you were still living.”

“I couldn’t let him marry that young girl—that would have been monstrous. I thought we were doing right—”

“But we interfered in his life most decidedly, and we have arrived at a point where further interference has become absolutely essential in order that a young girl shall be saved from unmerited ignominy. In a way, he has himself to blame—”

“Yes,” interrupted Mrs. Hunter angrily, “if he had promised not to go on with his plans, as I believed he would do—”

“But what sort of happiness did that leave him? We must look at it from his viewpoint and not judge him too severely. I’m mighty sorry for the poor cuss. Had I known that you were still living, I would not have tried out my rejuvenation process; but I did not know, and I really thought I was doing him a favor.”

“I almost wish we had not interfered. Perhaps it might have been better to leave him in ignorance—”

“You do not believe that. You believe this act of ours was right, and if so we must believe that our interference was justifiable, and if we believe that, we must go on with our plans and make it impossible for Boyd to marry that little girl. I think you agree with me, do you not?”

“I don’t know. The most I know is that I’m very unhappy about it. Still, I do think it was right to let Boyd know that I am still his wife.” She remained quiet a moment, thinking,

then: "It is an awful thing to suggest, I suppose, but couldn't we let the matter rest?"

"Let him marry the girl?"

"If he decides to become a bigamist, are we to blame—after having told him about me? And he might go somewhere and get a divorce—"

"He could hardly do that, as he has said. Such things are never kept secret for very long. I'm sure he has no intention of doing it."

"We might warn the girl not to marry him—"

"She is not the type to be moved from her course by an anonymous letter. She is headstrong and independent—"

"And Boyd is stubborn. If she showed him the letter, he'd just hasten the wedding. I don't know what to do."

"I think you should carry out the plan we've outlined. And I truly believe your husband will live to thank you. For his own sake, he should be restrained."

"Restrained! It is that part of the plan which troubles me. I can't feel that anyone has a right to restrain another."

"That is a question that our greatest lawmakers settled long ago. They believed there must be restraint, under certain conditions, for the good of humanity—and the person to be restrained never had much to say in the matter. He was a menace—therefore restrained. Your husband has become a menace to a young girl—he flouts the marriage laws of the country, therefore he must be restrained until he has had time to think it over."

"But we constitute ourselves judges—"

"Judges, lawyers, court, everything," replied Jarou, "and we do it, hoping thereby to circumvent Dame Gossip. I dislike this quite as much as you do—but I interfered in Boyd's life more cruelly than I realized when I rejuvenated him—and now I feel that I must pay by doing something that I despise. I must think not only of him, but of that girl—of the innocent children that she and Boyd might bring into the world—of the

girl's poor old worried parents—oh, believe me, Mrs. Hunter, you and I have a very disagreeable duty to perform; and because of what we have already done for our pleasure—you in leaving him—I in rejuvenating him—we can't ignore the consequent duty."

"Well," sighed Mrs. Hunter, "perhaps you are right. Anyhow, we won't do him any real harm—and we'll be giving him one more chance to set himself free from the false position in which he is now living. What do you want me to do?"

"First, we'll pack and send our baggage to the steamer. Our staterooms are engaged. I'll settle the bills at once. Then, ten minutes after I leave this hotel to go to your husband, you are to call him on the phone and engage him in conversation. Immediately after he hangs up the receiver, you are to take a taxi and go down to the wharf. Better go aboard at once, and stay in your stateroom until I call you."

Boyd still sprawled in the only easy chair the room afforded and that was not easy. Why had he come to such a place? He wasn't fleeing from justice. Why had he not written his own name on the hotel register, instead of John Jones? Why had he acted as if he must hide from everyone he knew? "Cut and run; cut and run"—the silly refrain rang through his brain until it almost maddened him. Doris Marie had sized him up correctly—he always looked for the easiest way out of difficulties. And how was he to meet this latest trouble? What could he do? Was there an easy way out of this situation? If so, he'd like some one to show it to him. What was in store for him—some other unguessed disaster? Why was Jarou so determined to see him again? What did that woman, who had been his wife, want him to do? Of course Jarou was in her employ—but for what purpose? Did she think he would ever take her back? She ought to know better than to expect that. No matter what she might do to him she could never

force him to live with her again, or to recognize her in any way as his wife. He hated her. He hated her almost as heartily as he hated Hicks Jarou, and that was saying much.

The phone bell was sounding. Should he answer? Was he about to be told of some new misery to be endured? Was Jarou announcing his arrival—or summoning him back to his hotel?

“Well,” he called through the phone, and his voice was ugly, “who is it—and what do you want?”

“It is I, Boyd; won’t you talk to me a minute?” It was Mary. Her voice trembled, as if she were close to tears; it was appealing, and yet it added to his anger. It made him feel particularly upset because it sounded so like the voice he recalled—the voice he had once considered the sweetest in the world. But he didn’t think so now, and Mary needn’t think she could win him over by staging any emotional stunts.

“All right—talk,” he replied, savagely; “but make it short, please; I’m in no mood for conversation.”

“Boyd, couldn’t you come over here to see me—alone!”

“I have not the slightest wish to see you.”

“But I have something to tell you—something of importance to you.”

“Well, I’m listening.”

“Oh, Boyd, please come. Please. I’d so like to tell you—I’d like to warn you, but it’s hard to talk over a phone. Come for five minutes, won’t you? It would be so much easier to tell you if you were here, and could see that I want to be your friend.”

“I have no desire for your friendship, and I most certainly shall not leave this room tonight. I’m going to bed—in five minutes.”

“Will you promise to call tomorrow morning—early?”

“No. I have no intention of calling. I do not want to see you. I’m quite sure you have nothing to tell me that I care to hear.”

"You are very hard, Boyd, aren't you?"

"You gave me reason enough to be hard where you are concerned."

"But Boyd—I know I did wrong—but I didn't think so at the time. Honestly, I did not think so. I could explain—if you'd only let me. I had a reason—I'm sure if you knew all you wouldn't feel quite as angry as you do now."

"What difference does it make—to either of us—how angry I am."

"It makes a difference with me."

"It must—after all these years."

"Boyd, don't hang up — Just a minute, Boyd — please — please! I really have something important to tell you—"

"All right; tell it."

"I can't—over the phone—won't you promise—"

"No. Didn't you hear me say I would never see you again, if I could help it? If you've got anything more to say, say it now. I shall not be here tomorrow."

"Where do you expect to be? I might write to the old address, if you're going back."

"Don't write. I don't want to hear from you. Why do you persist in adding to my misery. Haven't you done enough—"

The door opened softly and Hicks Jarou, accompanied by the small, dark man, who had brought Boyd a note earlier in the evening, slipped into the room. Boyd turned to face Jarou, and the little man stepped behind him so quickly that he did not see him at all.

"Get out," commanded Boyd angrily. "What right have you to break into my room—"

"Your door was not locked," said Jarou, softly, as he replaced the telephone receiver that Boyd had left hanging.

"Get out, this minute, before I kill you," shouted Boyd.

As he spoke, he started toward Jarou, as if he really meant to kill him. Perhaps he did. Perhaps he might, without really

having intended to do so, for he was furiously angry—quite beyond reason. Many murders have been committed in just that way—without having been planned by the murderer—who must spend the remainder of his days wondering how he happened to do it. But Boyd was not destined to become a murderer either wittingly or unwittingly. The small dark man sprang into the air, like a cat, landed on Boyd's shoulders, and thrust something into his mouth just as he opened it to scream for help. For a long, dark moment Boyd had the feeling that he was a little black speck in the center of an overpowering dazzling light through which he could not fight his way to safety. He realized that he had been given some very efficient anaesthetic—that he must fight for breath—that he was falling—falling—falling—and then he knew nothing more.

"We'll make him swallow this," said Hicks Jarou, as they laid Boyd on the floor. "It will begin to take effect by the time he recovers consciousness. Hold his mouth open. Pour it in a drop at a time, so as not to choke him. There. That's very nice. He isn't going to give us a bit of trouble."

A half hour later, Jarou appeared before the hotel clerk, who was trying to keep awake behind his desk, and making a poor job of it.

"My friend in room fifteen," said Jarou, pleasantly, and yet in a tone of anxiety—

"Do you mean John Jones?" asked the clerk.

"Yes, John Jones."

"It's late. I don't believe he'll see you—but I'll find out." He went to the phone as he spoke, but Jarou interposed.

"My good man," he said, "I really believe you have been asleep. I have been with Mr. Jones for an hour."

"You have? I didn't see you come in."

"You were not on duty when I came in. Mr. Jones was not feeling well and sent for me, and I came over at once. I am a doctor. I'm sorry to tell you that I fear my friend is coming down with smallpox."

"Smallpox," gasped the clerk; "why, he can't have smallpox here."

"Of course not," agreed Jarou. "That would mean quarantine—"

"It would ruin our business. Wait. I'll call up the boss—"

"No need to do that," said Jarou, in his pleasantest and most efficient manner. "We'll just call a taxi and take Mr. Jones away, and none of your guests need know anything about it. Tomorrow you can fumigate his room, and there'll be absolutely no danger to anyone. You can take my word for that."

The clerk was very grateful. He was willing to do anything to get rid of Mr. Jones. The taxi was called. Mr. Jones was helped downstairs by the doctor and his assistant. The clerk carried the poor man's baggage. He noticed that the patient did not seem to realize where he was or what he was doing. The doctor said he was delirious—too ill to walk without assistance—and he appeared to be very ill indeed. The clerk had not known that smallpox could take so sudden a turn for the worse. It was good to have the man out of the house. And as the doctor had paid his bill, the boss could find no fault.

Again Boyd Hunter crossed the ocean without feeling any of the pangs of mal de mer. He had a faint recollection, when he tried to get his thoughts straightened out later on, that he must have been on a steamship, and well cared for, and that the trip occupied several days. He slept most of the time, and was glad of the rest. He seemed to feel that he had passed through some severe trial, and had, perhaps, gone about as far as he could without an attack of nervous prostration. Perhaps he was already suffering from that trouble; he did not know or care. He was comfortable. Sometimes a man came into his cabin to care for him; sometimes it was a woman with a sweet, rather plaintive voice, a voice that he seemed to have heard

hundreds of years ago. He didn't care enough to try to remember. He just wanted to lie still and sleep.

When Boyd finally regained consciousness, it was to find himself in a very attractive bedroom done in shades of old rose—and a bouquet of fragrant roses stood on a table beside his bed. He looked about him curiously. There was a framed photograph standing on the dresser. It looked familiar—why, it was one he had given his wife just before they were married! They both thought it was the best picture he'd ever had taken. They had gone together to select the frame—and there had been a photograph of her in a frame to match—where was that? Oh, that! He remembered now. He had thrown that into a box in the attic of the old place, not so long after his wife had left him. It had made him so angry—he'd decided to get it out of his sight. He was beginning to remember—many things. The meeting with his wife who had looked so unbelievably old—the talk with her over the phone—the fight in that little hotel room with Hicks Jarou—how had that ended—why—why damn the man he had kidnapped him! He had brought him here. Where? He heard voices under his window—servants chattering in French—now he knew—he had been brought back to France. Kidnapped, drugged and brought to France! That was an outrage for which some one would pay dearly. He'd get even with that man Jarou if it took him the remainder of his life. He'd get even—but how? Suddenly Boyd began to feel very helpless. He recalled his satisfaction after having talked with Jarou and his wife in that hotel—after having convinced them that they had no power over him. He thought he had convinced them. They had seemed to agree with him—and then they had kidnapped him and carted him away like a useless old scarecrow. Boyd felt increasingly helpless, as he tried to analyze the situation, and to guess what was still in store for him.

Why had he been brought here? What did Jarou plan to do to him now? Make him over again? Make him look his age?

He had said, once, that he couldn't do that. Had he since learned how to do it, and did he propose to practice on him? Could he do it? If so, did he, Boyd Hunter, want to be made to look his age?—no, not really. He wanted to be let alone.

Boyd glanced about the room hoping to see his clothes. He wanted to get up—to dress—to meet the enemy and vanquish him—to go back home—but more than all else he wanted something to eat. He was famished. He'd hunt up a cafe—

There were no garments to be found—not even a bath robe. There was a locked door that probably led into a closet. This was evidently a woman's room. Doubtless the closet held her garments. A little bell stood on the table. Perhaps it had been left there for his use. He'd find out.

He rang the bell, and it brought him the greatest surprise he had ever known. A young man entered—a graceful young man who walked with a little spring as if he could hardly keep his feet on the floor—a handsome young man of about thirty years with a thatch of curly red hair—a young man who looked so much like himself that it made him gasp as if he had been thrown head first into a tub of ice water.

“Who, in God's name, are you?” gasped Boyd, raising himself on one elbow and staring at his visitor as if he were seeing a ghost.

“No one to be afraid of, Dad,” said the young man, grinning in a most engaging manner; “I'm just your son, Boyd Hunter, Junior.”

“My son! But of course I'm dreaming. I've never had a son.” He pinched himself to make sure that he was awake. “I must be delirious,” he added, “and you are—you must be—a sort of wraith.”

“Wraith nothing,” laughed the young man. “Feel that,” extending his arm and flexing the muscle rather vaingloriously. “Think a wraith would have an arm like that?”

“Tell me truly,” begged Boyd, “who are you?”

"I'm your son ; honest, Dad. You've got to believe it sooner or later—eventually, why not now?" He grinned again. "Mother had to go out for a little while," he continued, "and she left me here to look after you. Guess I'm a darned poor nurse. The way I broke the good news—it was too sudden to be comfortable, wasn't it? Mother had planned to tell you and make you like it—" here the young man laughed again ; "she'd have done it a little more tactfully. You see, she had not expected you'd wake up quite so soon. She told me that you had never been notified of my arrival, and she didn't know how you'd like having a son thrown at your head—as it were. Please try not to look upon me as one more calamity."

"I can't disown you," murmured Boyd, reflectively. "You must be speaking the truth. Very likely you are my son—as you say. You look as I did—"

"Better say as you do," interrupted the young man. "We are as alike as two peas. It's astonishing. We'd be taken for twins anywhere. Say, Dad, I don't care, if you don't. Hold on—don't faint ! You look all in—what can I do for you?"

"Kindly leave me alone for a little while," begged the bewildered man. "I'll be all right—just a little confused you know—got to think. This makes me actually ill."

"Poor Dad ; I don't wonder at it. I had to come in when you rang—I didn't know what else to do. Please buck up. Don't let this hit you too hard."

The young man patted his father's shoulder and left the room, turning at the door to throw him a friendly grin. Even the poor bewildered father had to admit that he was the most engaging sort of young man, with a grin that was actually infectious.

"And so," thought Boyd Hunter, "it wasn't a lie after all—at least not as much of a lie as I had believed I was telling. The boy's mother may have left home while suffering from some mental trouble due to pregnancy, just as I let folks think. Doubtless that is what she had tried to tell me—over the

phone—what I refused to hear. But why did she not tell me of the birth of the boy in the first place? I must find out about that.”

Then Boyd began to wonder how he could have spent hours inventing a lie that was no lie at all? How had he happened to make his story so like the facts in the case? Had Jarou told him something, while he lay, only partially conscious, in that sanitarium—had he told him something that lingered in his memory, and furnished the material for the story he had so carefully put together? If so, might there not be some excuse for his conduct? Could he be considered simply an unmitigated liar? If he'd been hypnotized, and the story had been told him—and Hicks Jarou would admit it—why then he could get out of this mess without despising himself as a falsifier—and it did seem as if the necessary readjustment would be a little less difficult.

Boyd's privacy was again interrupted—this time by the unannounced entrance of his wife, who walked in as casually as she would have done had she never separated herself from her husband.

“Boydie told me you were awake,” she said, “and that he had talked with you. I am sorry he had to introduce himself. He is a nice boy, isn't he?”

“Why was I never told about him,” demanded Boyd, instantly belligerent.

“For one reason,” replied his wife, “I was afraid you would try to take him away from me.”

“Couldn't you have come back and brought him to his own home? Couldn't we have lived together as soon as you had recovered from the nervous disorder brought on by pregnancy?”

“I suppose my condition did have something to do with my leaving you,” replied Mrs. Hunter, “but it was not entirely responsible. When I left you I did not know I was to have a child. Had I known I should not have gone. But having made the break—it didn't seem to me that I could ever return.”

"Why not?"

"I was not happy in your home—not after the first month. I was desperately lonely. You gave yourself to your business so closely that when you came home you were too tired to visit with me. You were too tired to take me anywhere. You were too tired to have guests. And you were often too cross to be a comfortable companion. You never told me about your business, or anything that interested you. I felt that I was nothing more than a working housekeeper in your home, and I decided that I might do the same amount of work in some other home, get paid for doing it, have time off to run around with other girls—in fact, make a life for myself that would seem to me better worth living."

"I see," grunted Boyd, "and I didn't count at all."

"I really did not believe you would miss me. You had your business—"

"I was working hard to build up that business so that I might buy things for you—"

"When I was too old to care whether I had them or not. I wanted companionship—"

"Well, you seem to have found it. Where did you pick up old Jarou?"

"Oh, I've only known him a little while. He chanced to see Boydie on the street, one day, thought he was you—and followed him home. I was amazed enough when he told me why he thought Boydie was you. I'd read about regeneration, of course—"

"Let's not talk of that—now. Tell me how you managed—when you knew there was to be a child—my son, that I was not to know about."

"I found a position as clerk—did so well that I was taken in as partner, was so much liked by my partner that she willed me her share when she died. That was ten years ago. Boydie helps me with the business, now. Boyd, I wish you would believe me when I tell you that I'm very happy because you have

at last met your son. He is a fine boy. I've brought him up as carefully as I knew how."

"You had no right to keep me in ignorance—"

"I know that. I often felt that it was unfair to the boy—but I didn't know what else to do. I was afraid you'd take him from me—and I am very sure you would have tried to."

"I most certainly should—but I'd have tried to get you to come with us."

"And I've never wanted to go back—into the kitchen. Of course, I've always said I'd go back—some day—for I knew you must be told you had a son—some day before we both died. But your home always seemed like a prison—I couldn't think of it in any other way—and so I kept putting off the day—and of course I couldn't write until I meant to go back—and time flew by so fast. And then came Jarou, and he told me about you—and later he came again and told me you were to be married—Boyd, can't you understand that I had to prevent that for the sake of our son?"

CHAPTER XVIII.

Dicky and Joe-Anne were keeping house in Dicky's studio—a very light variety of light housekeeping, since they had purchased nothing new, and Dicky's housekeeping equipment was decidedly sketchy.

"I don't believe you can make it work," he told Joe-Anne. "You'll get discouraged and downhearted and our joy will be smashed to smithereens."

"When it is thus smashed," retorted Joe-Anne, grinning, "you'll be the little smasher that does the job. You'll begin by complaining about something, and I'll not stand for a very large dose of criticism, and so the fireworks will get started."

"We're married, and I presume there'll be duties of hospitality that can't be ignored—"

"See here, Dicky, you managed to get your own meals and as I remember, you did considerable entertaining as well. Now my idea is that we can go on as you began—provided we don't try to emulate some one else. Let's be independent about it. If our friends want to come to see us, let them come as they did before we were married. We're not trying to impress anyone. We're poor. We're not going to act as if we were rich. We're going to learn how to save a little of what we have, and we're going to have a lot of fun doing it. We don't care a tinker's darn what anyone thinks about our style of housekeeping, as long as we are happy and independent."

What these two young people had was little enough, according to present day values. They might have had help from their respective parents, but they preferred to carve out their own destiny. Joe-Anne adored difficult situations, and exulted over every little victory. She had the spirit of a conqueror, and a sense of humor that lightened what otherwise might have worn a drab hue. Dicky didn't care anything about appearances. He

didn't need much in the way of luxuries—but he liked to be comfortable. His parents were well-to-do; but he had left home because his father was determined to take his son into business with himself, and Dicky was determined to win fame as a cartoonist. The father was delighted to hear of his son's marriage, believing that it would lead to the boy's return to the office. "He'll soon find out," said the father, comfortably, "that he can't support a wife on what he can earn—and when he comes back he'll be received with open arms."

"If only I could have helped give them a nice wedding," sighed Dicky's mother. "They never bought one new thing to get married in, and Joe-Anne didn't let anyone give her a wedding present—said they might feel that they had to 'pay back' at a time when they wouldn't be able to do it—"

"Darned sensible about that," interrupted Dicky's father. "The boy showed a lot of sense, I'd say, when it came to picking a wife."

"But a wife who wouldn't take wedding presents, and wouldn't buy a wedding gown, and wouldn't have a honeymoon that a son like ours could easily have given her, if he'd only consulted us—and who has gone to housekeeping in a bare little studio—why, how do you expect her to let Dicky go into business with you. As I see it, she's the kind to let Dicky do pretty much as he wants to—and she married him knowing that he wants to be a cartoonist."

"Wait until we hear that a little grandchild is on the way," advised Dicky's father. "Nothing makes a man long for the fleshpots like that. He'll want everything money can buy when he faces that fact, you may be jolly sure of that—and a position in my office with a good fat salary attached will look very different to him from what it does now."

"Maybe," replied the wife doubtfully. "I hope you're right—but I've seen Joe-Anne—and she looks so—so capable. I believe she'd even manage to become a mother—as the very poor do—and make a joke of it."

"As the poor do not," added the father. "Don't you worry, mother, but take my word for it. Dicky's marriage is the one thing that will bring my boy back into my business."

When Doris Marie first heard of Joe-Anne's marriage, she declared that she would never speak to either one of them again. She felt that neither Joe-Anne nor Dicky had a right to run away and get married without telling her of their intentions—and to do it on the very day when she was expecting Dicky to escort her to a party—it really wasn't a friendly thing to do. But her affair with Bert Baldwin—begun just to "save her face" as she expressed it—was proving much more interesting than she had expected it would be, and that helped her to get over her "just indignation"—again we quote her—and profess herself as ready and willing to forgive her enemies. Besides, she was exceedingly curious as to housekeeping arrangements in Dicky's studio. She knew it simply couldn't be done—but Joe-Anne had a way of accomplishing things that everyone knew were impossible, and Doris Marie's curiosity demanded a visit to the studio. She decided not to acquaint her friends with her intentions, but take them by surprise. She wouldn't give Joe-Anne an opportunity to dust the furniture and get ready to receive her, and pretend that her housekeeping was always as well done as she found it. And so she went without an invitation, and entered without knocking—as she had done before Dicky was married.

"Helloa, there," she said, quite casually. "Eating? Got enough for me?"

"Well, Doris Marie, you mean thing, to drop in like this—and you're an old dear to do it! Shows you have faith in my housekeeping. We're having tomatoes on toast, and there's plenty for you. I was going to use what was left to make escalloped tomatoes for tomorrow, but now there won't be any left and I can think up something else."

Dicky shook hands as cordially as if he had never done a thing to merit her disapproval, and drew up a chair for her

at the little folding table. "Shall I get you a plate," he asked, "or will you get it for yourself as per usual?"

"I'll be waited upon, if you please," replied Doris Marie—"just as if I'd been invited—as I should have been and wasn't. What's in the covered dish?"

"Scrambled eggs with a symptom of boiled ham," replied Dicky. "Hold up your plate; guess I can scrape together a spoonful for you."

They had a jolly half hour together, then Dicky excused himself and went into his den. "Got a job to finish," he said, "and when I get paid for it we'll have to divide it five ways—"

"Wrong there, Dicky," interrupted Joe-Anne; "you won't divide it at all; you'll just hand it over to me." Then, turning to Doris Marie, "Dicky couldn't buy as much comfort with ten dollars as I can with five, and so I've elected myself treasurer of this company."

"Do you have to economize dreadfully?" asked Doris Marie when she and Joe-Anne had the room to themselves.

"We pinch every penny," replied Joe-Anne, happily. "It is the most exciting sport I've ever taken part in. I read cook-books from morning until night trying to get the necessary number of vitamins and calories into our food, and each day save a few pennies from the sum the previous day demanded. The few pennies saved go right into the bank, and there's where we find our wildest excitement—adding the dollar deposits in our bank book."

"Thought you spoke in terms of pennies a moment ago?"

"Yes; we have a child's bank where we park the pennies, and when they amount to a dollar they go into the savings bank and when we get a hundred dollars together, we're going to buy a bond—"

"What kind of bond?"

"Don't know, yet. I'm studying up about bonds—so I'll be ready when the hundred dollars materialize. It's stacks of fun, Doris Marie."

"It wouldn't be fun for me. I want a home—and a maid to do the work that I don't like to do—and I shouldn't care to count pennies, especially when I wanted a good juicy steak for dinner."

"We afford steak once in two weeks; we don't need it oftener than that—and when we get it only that often we enjoy it as we shouldn't do if we could buy it just when we happened to think we wanted it. And when we have steak one day, we have macaroni and cheese the next. I've worked out menus for three weeks, and each week is different. Why, you can't imagine how interesting it is to do that. Then I wrote up some of the ways I found to make a little go a long way, and sold them to a domestic magazine for three dollars. I put that money into the bank, and believe me, I'm going to experiment some more, and write about it. I'm just the happiest girl in the world."

"You actually do look contented," said Doris Marie, as if she could hardly believe the testimony of her own eyes.

"Contented! Is that all you see? Didn't you hear me say I'm the happiest girl you know? But I shouldn't be, Doris Marie, if I had married for any reason except love. I can do anything for Dicky and rejoice in it no matter how hard; but if I looked at life as you do, I should want everything that money can buy—just as you do. And even then I wouldn't do it—because money can't buy the companionship Dicky and I give each other."

"If Bert Baldwin weren't such a lady," blurted out Doris Marie, "I believe I'd marry him,"

"Bert is a nice boy," replied Joe-Anne; "I should be sorry to see him married to you."

"I'd like to know why?"

"Because you don't love him—and never will. You don't even respect him, or you couldn't speak of him as a perfect lady."

Doris Marie grinned. "Perhaps," she said, "I might reform him. That ought to be easier than marrying a drunkard to reform him—and we've often heard of girls doing that. Bert is a nice boy—but he is lazy. His mother declares that if Bert marries me, she'll will all her property to some hospital—and he believes that and it scares him half to death. Now I don't believe it for one little minute. Bert is the only child she has. Of course she wouldn't disinherit him, especially when she found out how happy I made him."

"You wouldn't make him happy. You couldn't, Doris Marie, because you don't love him. And he doesn't love you. If he did, he'd be willing to work for you. He'd go find something to do that would make him independent of his mother."

"I think he really does care a great deal about me. He is very jealous, and that is a sign of affection, isn't it?"

"Not when that is the only indication. The only sign worth considering would be proof that he was ready and willing and able to take care of you without any help from his mother. And you'd never wait for him to make good, even if he decided to try, because you don't care enough for him to wait for him. I should be very sorry to hear that you and Bert were married because I like you both. Of course, if Bert's mother were willing to continue supporting him, and didn't object to supporting his wife, also, you might manage, because Bert seems very pliable and wouldn't be likely to quarrel with you."

"I think," said Doris Marie, coldly, "that marriage hasn't improved you as a friend. You seem able to advise the world—just as most girls do as soon as they annex a husband."

"Well, dear, you know you don't have to take my advice. You never did, for that matter. And you always get huffy about it—but it is nice to remember that our quarrels never last very long—so I'm going to hope for a nice long visit with you very soon. Goodby, dear."

Bert's mother was determined that her son should not marry Doris Marie, and Bert became quite morbid over her decision. He declared that he had a right to a share of her property, that she had no right to will it to anyone else, or to dictate as to how he should spend a proportionate amount of it. She had brought him into the world without asking his consent, and it was up to her to look out for him and make him comfortable and happy. If she were unable to do that, he might understand that he should work for his living, but under existing conditions he should not be expected to work at all since it was unnecessary. To this her only reply was that the power to provide for him or not rested with her, and she would have nothing more to do with him if he married Doris Marie, because she did not believe that girl would make any man happy. She wanted a daughter-in-law who would seem like a daughter, and Doris Marie always sneered at her or poked fun at her. Mother and son quarrelled quite bitterly over it, one evening after Doris Marie had accepted an invitation from another young man, and he informed his mother that he would not continue to live if Doris Marie married anyone but him. He wished to marry her at once to make sure of her; but the mother was not to be coaxed or threatened. She simply would not consent to her son's marriage with Doris Marie; so the badly trained, undisciplined, misguided boy settled the question by taking his own life. He went out to the garage before the mother's answer was really elaborated as she had meant it to be, made himself comfortable in his car, and left the world by the monoxide poisoning route.

This caused more talk than the affair warranted because it offered opportunity for decided and strongly opposed opinions. No one thought Bert Baldwin's death was a great loss to the community, but he formed a theme for more than one sermon, and many editorials, on how not to train a child. Some blamed the mother; others pitied her. Some smiled because Doris Marie was once more without a cavalier, and others were

sorry for her. They did not think she deserved the unpleasant notoriety that came with the disappearance of one lover and the suicide of another. Willis Mayne, another of Doris Marie's set, asked her to go to the Friday night dances, and she accepted rather too soon after the death of Bert to please the older people. They thought it showed a heartlessness that was inexcusable. Mr. and Mrs. Mayne were leaders in this view of the distracted girl, and took immediate steps to protect their son by sending him on a business trip to South America, where they proposed to keep him until he had time to get over his infatuation, or until Doris Marie was safely married. Mrs. Mayne talked freely of their reason for sending their son away, and without any thought of the effect it might have on Doris Marie. It resulted in almost social eclipse for her for quite some time. She simply was not invited, except to parties made up entirely of girls. Her old friends among the boys were always glad to see her, treated her like one of themselves, would have been glad to show her some attention if any of the other fellows had invited her—but not one of them invited her to go anywhere with him. They talked of Sidney, who, they claimed, had been driven into companionate marriage with a girl he didn't care for because Doris Marie refused to ask her father to set him up in business. They talked of Boyd Hunter who had evidently decided at almost the last minute that it would be easier to run away than to marry her. They talked of Dicky Graham, who had left her without any explanation and eloped with Joe-Anne. They talked of Bert Baldwin who had committed suicide because of her, and of Willis Mayne, who had been sent to South America. It was evident to them all that it was not safe to pay attention to Doris Marie—and yet they agreed that she was the most popular girl in the bunch—the one who contributed most of the spice to their entertainments—the one they'd prefer to take about if only they dared to. But it really was not safe—and so they refused to invite her, and they criticized her openly,

and did not recognize the fact that she was really better worth knowing than any of them.

Doris Marie's distracted parents were quite unhappy over the situation. They were not blind to the faults of their little girl, but they knew she did not deserve the treatment that she was receiving. The trouble was, they could not seem to find any way to help her. When a pack of young animals decides to ostracize one of their number, it is useless, as a rule, for the adults to interfere.

No one knew exactly how Doris Marie felt about her unenviable position. She kept her own counsel, and if she missed being invited to the parties, no one guessed it, because about that time she became a very busy young lady. She was brave—a good sport she called herself—and she had initiative. She subscribed for a correspondence course in short story writing, joined an evening class in journalism, and a day class in domestic economy, and also engaged a private tutor to give her lessons in psychology. She really did not have any time for social diversions, as her old friends could understand without being told. And she took up her studies with such energy and enthusiasm that she won the warmest praise from her teachers, as well as the respect of her fellow students. A different halo was shining over her now—but she had her halo—and it was becoming, and observed—and envied.

CHAPTER XIX.

Boyd felt that he was drifting—marking time—waiting for something to turn up that would serve as a key to the solution of his problem concerning his immediate future. He despised himself for his vacillation, and yet felt himself powerless to reach a decision. There seemed to be a Fate with whose commands he could not cope.

He had left his wife's home, on the day following his introduction to his son, and had taken an inexpensive room in a *pension* near by. He had a premonition that his problem would not be speedily solved, and had decided that he must make what money he had brought with him last as long as possible. He did not care to send home for more until his future course had been determined. Until that time, he preferred that none of his old associates should know where he was. He had kept in touch with the New York papers, and knew of the search that had been instituted, and how it had frittered out—a surprisingly inadequate bit of detective work, according to his idea. But he was glad the case had been dropped as practically hopeless, because he wished to stage his return to the New York office without the help of any officious outsider.

He also read, in the columns devoted to social news, of the various activities of the younger generation—items that would not have interested him at all a comparatively few months ago. He was glad to know that Doris Marie and Dicky Graham seemed to be taking a prominent part in everything that would naturally appear to them to be worth while, and that their names were linked together. Evidently, Doris Marie was not allowing his mysterious disappearance to affect her health and spirits to any appreciable extent. He was glad of that, and it

was well for his peace of mind that nothing appeared in the papers about her experiences with her other cavaliers. That would have worried him. He wanted her to have whatever she thought she needed to make her happy. But, while he missed her far more than he cared to acknowledge, even to himself, he realized that he no longer wished to marry her. He was beginning to wonder how he could have entertained that idea for a moment—a man of his age! Mightn't that be looked upon as an evidence of approaching senility? He was quite sure that his wife so regarded it.

Mary steadfastly refused to consider Boyd's youthful appearance as an indication of recovered youth, and she made him feel that, in reality, she was very much younger than he was. He had to admit that in spirit she did seem younger. For instance, she understood their son as he had not learned to understand any of the younger generation, and was a real companion to him, whereas he himself could not get nearer than an interested and attentive observer. But notwithstanding their long separation, and the very difference in their appearance, he did somehow seem to understand his wife. He grudgingly acknowledged, to himself, that he felt more comfortable with her than he had with anyone since she had left his home. But that did not mean that he wished to live with her again. He realized that to do so would make him ridiculous. He could not think that it would make her ridiculous, because she was simply being natural, and had no excuse to make for anything. Besides, she was so serenely indifferent to what others might say of her personal appearance, that she wouldn't be hurt by invidious comparisons, as he would have been in her place. No, his self respect demanded that he live apart from her—but he did not mean to entirely lose touch with her again. He decided that he'd prefer to be where he could not see her—but that he very much wanted to hear from her—and frequently. He would leave France forever as soon as he had decided what to do with himself.

Hicks Jarou had returned to his sanitarium and his work as soon as he felt sure that Boyd had regained consciousness, and would be no worse for his enforced trip across the Atlantic. But before he left, he had insisted upon having a talk with Boyd, and also insisted that Boyd should listen without animus—as any sane man would listen to a business proposition.

“I am going to make you a proposition, Mr. Hunter,” he said, “that is quite likely not to appeal to you, now; but which might interest you later on—when you have had time to adjust yourself to the new conditions that have been forced upon you.”

“Very well,” said Boyd briefly; “I’ll hear what you say, but I don’t expect to be interested.”

“You don’t want to be interested,” said Jarou with a smile—“but you are really too good a business man to dismiss what I’m going to tell you without thinking it over. I am moved to confide in you for two reasons; first, I need a good business man to help me.”

“Might as well stop right there,” interrupted Boyd. “You could not name any consideration that would induce me to join you. I do not like you. Nothing would induce me to see you again—if I could avoid it. I don’t say I never shall, because you have proven that I can’t help myself—but of my own accord, I shall never have anything more to do with you.”

“I understand exactly how you think you feel,” replied Jarou pleasantly—“and I also know that you have no idea how you are going to feel before you have decided upon your future plans. You will probably not believe me when I tell you that you will never go back to New York to live—yet I am convinced that you will not.”

“I may not,” admitted Boyd, “and on the other hand I may decide to take the bull by the horns and face the difficulties. However, any decision I may make will not include you.”

“If you do not return to your old office, you will need a new occupation—and if you are to retain your sanity it must be

something absorbing. What do you suppose I have taken up—”

“I neither know nor care,” interrupted Boyd, rudely. He felt the magnetism—the charm of the man so keenly that it seemed to him that the only way to relieve himself of Jarou’s presence was to emphasize his animosity so offensively that it could not be misunderstood. If he did not get rid of him—and speedily—he might be converted into a receptive attitude—as he had been before.

“There will soon be placed on the market,” continued Jarou, as calmly as if Boyd had not spoken, “a very wonderful gem that will be called the Jarou stone. It is more beautiful than either the ruby or the diamond, and will command a greater price.”

“Synthetic?” asked Boyd, interested in spite of himself.

“Yes, but composed of substances so difficult to obtain, and so difficult to compound that it can never be made cheaply, nor can it ever be made in quantity. It will interest the wealthy because of its almost prohibitive price, and the fact that it must always be rare. Every gem now on the market will drop in price when the Jarou stone becomes known.”

“And until it is followed by excellent imitations,” suggested Boyd.

“That can never happen,” replied Jarou, eagerly, “and for this reason: This gem is so compounded that it has a wonderful effect on the nervous system. Therein lies its real value. That effect can not be imitated. I, alone, know the secret. But no one can wear the gem without being made aware of its beneficial effect, or wear an imitation without detecting the fraud. In spite of its price there will be a demand for the Jarou stone that can never be quite filled. Do you realize what that means? Think of the shattered nerves of America’s smart set!”

“Why America, so particularly?”

“In no other country is extreme nervousness so noticeable. Besides, in no other country can one find so many people with money enough to afford such a gem. As a business venture, the

sale of these gems presents a dazzling opportunity to the right man."

"You are speaking to the wrong man, now," Boyd reminded him.

"You might be the right man," replied Jarou; "you have all the qualifications. And should you decide that you could not remain in France with your wife, and could not return to your old office, and yet that you must have some interesting occupation, and would not object to something that would make you a far richer man than you have ever been—well, my friend, I believe you will yet consider the Jarou stone."

"Perhaps," replied Boyd doubtfully. "You make it sound interesting, but I feel that as soon as I have had the pleasure of shutting my door behind you, I shall begin to get glimpses of the hidden joker. I may think of the Jarou stone again—but never at all seriously."

"All right; we'll let it go at that. When I leave you I am going back to my sanitarium where a most interesting work is being carried on. For years I have sought the missing link—"

Boyd had arisen and had his hand on his door knob. "I have an engagement," he began, trying to speak apologetically, "and I fear I must ask to be excused."

"You have no pressing engagement," laughed Jarou, who had also arisen, and was now drawing on his gloves. "The trouble with you is that I've been giving you pretty strong medicine, and it makes you dizzy. Well, we won't say goodbye, because I am convinced that we shall meet again."

With that, Jarou had left the room and Boyd had not seen him again. He had run in, his wife told him, to say goodbye to her, and to remind her that he was always at her service. He had said that he had no idea when he should see her again.

"I could be interested in that man," admitted Boyd, "if he had not done what he did to me. He is a man whom I would enjoy talking to—he is stimulating—but—" he threw out his hands in a gesture of dismissal.

"But if he hadn't done what he did for you," his wife reminded him, "you would not be here now to talk to anyone."

"No," replied Boyd, "undoubtedly I should not. At that time it mattered tremendously. Today, I wonder why I was so anxious to live. I've been recalling that hour in Central Park before Jarou came to me. I'll never forget how I suffered because I'd been told I had cancer of the liver. It was awful. I was willing to try anything—anything—just to live. Well, I took the chance he offered—and I lived—and now I'm asking myself to what purpose, and telling myself that I might better have died."

"I don't agree with you," replied his wife, briskly; "I don't agree with you at all. You weren't ready to die; you aren't ready now, for that matter. If you've come to feel that you might have done better than you did do—why, that in itself is sufficient reason for going on. Don't waste time thinking about it—just buckle down and *do* better."

"Is your wisdom born of experience?" asked Boyd a little acidly.

"Yes, it is—heart breaking experience. You see, there came a time when I was no longer thinking primarily of myself—what I wanted or didn't want—what I was missing that rightly belonged to me—what I might have had, or might still have—all that sort of gloomy stuff, you know. That was while I was in the hospital with my little man-child—our son. And from my first conscious moment as a mother I ceased to come first in my desires. Then I thought 'I have a son, and I have robbed him of his home and of his father—'

"But you surely must have known you could come back!"

"I think I did know, Boyd, in a way; but I didn't know I knew. I told myself that I'd cut my bridges behind me—that somehow I'd make it all up to my son—and that anyhow you'd never forgive me—"

"How could you have thought that? You must have known I loved you."

"I was sure you loved me in your own way—but that didn't satisfy me. I wanted to be loved in my way, and I was quite sure you would never understand that. And I was right about it. You would not have understood. If I had gone back to you, in order to give our boy a home and a father, I should have fretted all the rest of my life because your domination would have been more intolerable, and my dependence more complete. I am glad I did not go back, and yet I've suffered constantly because I felt that I had robbed our son. I have done my best by him—I have really done very well—but I have not been able to give him the advantages that he could have had if we had gone back to you. And every day—every day—I have told myself, 'I will go back—someday. Boydie is young; he can afford to let me live my life a few years longer—for most of his life is ahead of him.' And so the days have passed—and I've marked time—and waited for something to happen that would compel me to decide—you know how that is, Boyd; you know because you're doing that yourself, right now."

"Yes, I suppose I am," sighed her husband, miserably—"just marking time. Did you tell me Jarou had left his address with you?"

"Yes; do you want it?"

"No—no, not now at any rate; but later on I might want to look him up."

"He is still at that place where he took you—had you forgotten?"

"I wasn't sure. I destroyed the address he gave me, and I tried to forget it—and I really was not sure, anyhow, that he was still there."

Mrs. Hunter laughed merrily: "Boyd," she said, "how you do like to camouflage! You know perfectly well that your only reason for asking for that address was because you hoped I'd be surprised into giving you a little advice about Jarou's offer. Well, I shall do nothing of the sort. You've got to decide that for yourself."

Time slipped by—a week—a month—three months—it would soon be a year since Boyd had been abducted—and he still lived in the inexpensive little *pension*, making his steadily dwindling bank notes go as far as he could, visiting his wife nearly every day, sometimes helping her in her business with really valuable suggestions, and steadily becoming better acquainted with his son.

The boy was really his anchor. He was fascinated by him. He couldn't really believe in him, for a long time, as being his own son, and when he reviewed any particular day they had chanced to spend together, he could see how inadequate had been his perception of the tie between father and son, when he had tried to act the part of son back in New York. How had he gotten by with so lifeless a performance? He couldn't have done it if everyone he knew had not been so wrapped up in himself that he had preferred to accept any statement, to the job of thinking out the reasons for little acts that seemed anomalous. Even though he could be assured that he would not be molested, he knew that he could never again try to pass himself off as his own son. If he returned to New York it must be as Boyd Hunter, Sr., rejuvenated.

How would it be if he merely wrote to Stafford, asking that money be sent him, asking about the business, and the house, and merely saying that he was not yet ready to return to New York, and did not care to explain his absence until he could do so in person? Would Stafford believe that he was himself and forward the money—or would he fear that the request came from an imposter and insist upon proof of his identity? And of course to write would be to bring some one from among his old acquaintances to see him. "Going to France?" he could hear them say, "why not look up Boyd Hunter while you're over there? We'd all like to know how he is getting on, and when he means to come home, and why he left so mysteriously." Boyd drew a long breath, and shook his head. He was not ready to see old friends, yet.

Suppose he went to work for Hicks Jarou, making a market for the Jarou stone? He felt pretty confident that he could make a go of that. He could go to America, but not to New York; he could go to South America, and visit all the leading cities of Europe. He could earn his living easily and see a lot of the world, and let his business run itself with the help of Stafford. But somehow that idea did not please him. He wanted his son to inherit his business and his home and all else that belonged to him. And that is what the boy's mother had desired when she decided to prevent his second marriage—that and a stainless name that the boy would not be ashamed of. How was it to be brought about? He must reach a decision soon. His money was almost gone. He had idled long enough. What should he do? He tossed, sleeplessly, all night, and arose the next morning as far as ever from reaching a solution to his problem.

Boyd junior rushed into his father's room in the *pension*, as Boyd senior finished his coffee, which he always took in his own room.

"Morning, Dad," he said gaily—then, his voice suddenly taking on a note of anxiety, "what's the matter? You look as if you hadn't slept any too well."

"Didn't sleep at all," grumbled the father.

"You need exercise, Dad; that's all that ails you. Get your hat and come on down to the shop with me. I've made mother take a day off."

"Why, isn't she feeling well? Is she overworking?"

"She says not. I don't know; but she certainly doesn't look well—hasn't, to my notion for more than a month."

"I hadn't noticed it, Son."

"You wouldn't be likely to. You don't know her as well as I do."

"No; no, of course not. Perhaps you'd better call in a doctor. Who is her physician?"

"She hasn't one—refuses to see one—says she knows what

ails her—that it is nothing serious, and she'll come out all right."

The two men had left the house and were swinging down the street, shoulder to shoulder. People turned to look at them, they were so strikingly alike—and so handsome. One seldom saw twins who resembled each other more closely. They exchanged glances of grave comprehension, as they chanced to overhear one of the many comments that were usually made about them.

"The only difference, Dad," said Boyd junior, "is that I am beginning to turn gray at the temples, and you're not."

"Gray! At the temples! You! Nonsense."

"You haven't noticed it because red hair like ours doesn't turn gray exactly as darker hair does—it just gets lighter and lighter and finally becomes white."

"But you, Son—why you are not old enough—"

"Dad, I'm thirty. You and mother can't seem to realize that. I've never tried to make mother realize, because I've been all she had—and she has liked to think of me as still young and dependent—dependent upon her, you know—and I've just let her have her way. But, Dad, I do want you to understand—"

"Yes, Son—go on; just what must I try to understand?"

"I want my freedom. I want you to help me get it. I have felt, ever since you came—that you could manage somehow to set me free without hurting mother too much."

"She ought to understand. She says she left me because her soul demanded freedom."

"Yes, she told me so—and that she was sure you would not understand. Now my soul demands freedom, and I am afraid she won't understand. Life is a curious hotch-potch, isn't it?"

"Seems so, when one tries to analyze it. Son, can you give me any idea of the use you'd make of your freedom?"

"I know exactly what I want to do. I want to be in some business for myself. All my life I've just helped mother. The business is hers. It's all right, too, in a way—I feel a renegade

when I criticise it or complain—she makes a good living—we've always had all we needed—but it doesn't satisfy me."

"I think I understand. Go on."

"Then I want to marry—I want a home of my own—why, Dad, I'm thirty years old. I ought to have a son by this time!"

"Have you found the girl?"

"No; I haven't allowed myself to look for one. I haven't dared to. You see, it would nearly kill mother—you can see for yourself how she clings to me—"

"Yes—but I hadn't considered the relationship from your point of view. I see, now, that you are actually fettered."

"That's it! Fettered by chains too precious—too tender—to be rudely shattered—yet as tenacious as—why you can't know how I sometimes long to strike out—fight my way to freedom—ride rough-shod over everything and everybody—Dad, I just don't know what to do."

"Perhaps you magnify the trouble—"

"Say! you just mention my getting married—quite casually, you know, and watch mother's reaction. Then you'll realize what I'm up against."

"I already have a pretty good idea. I don't know what I can do, Son—not sure that I can do anything—but I'll think it over."

"Dad, you can't fool me! You've got your hunch."

"Well, yes, I have. Guess I can find a way out."

"Bully for you! I've felt all along that you could help me, if only you once understood."

The two men entered the little shop—an attractive little shop that spoke of a woman's ownership. Boyd senior, looked about with more interest than he had yet shown in it. He had never thought of it as a real business, and yet it had supported two people in comparative comfort. So the boy was not satisfied, he mused—wanted something of greater importance—something all his own. Well, some day, when he had passed on—"

"It is a prosperous business," Boyd junior was saying—"and it looks prosperous."

"Yes," replied the father, "although rather mixed—not definitely one thing or another."

The son became busy, and the father continued his silent investigation. A curio shop, primarily, with souvenirs pertaining to France given decided prominence. He thought of the curio shops he had visited in the United States where all the souvenirs to be found in any part of the country were represented. No particular reason why the tourist should shop at any of them, when he would get the same thing in his own town. New Orleans, the Florida resorts, California or Alaska offered exactly what could be purchased in New York, Minneapolis or Montreal—and very little else. But in this little shop of his wife's there were souvenirs that she had made herself, or had designed—little things that spoke of France—desirable trifles that the tourist would not be likely to find anywhere else. A part of the business consisted of artistic book-binding—an occupation that Mary Hunter had taken up as a fad and then had made useful in her work. There were excellent translations, in English, of the best French books, and these were artistically bound in French colors, showing French designs, French armorial bearings, French scenery, French peasantry—all characteristic and desirable and not to be found anywhere else. There was a room adjoining the curio shop—Boyd junior called it his mother's holy of holies—where genuine antiques might be found—small things for most part, and not very expensive—many of them purchased from the peasantry—but all interesting and desirable from the standpoint of the traveler who knew something about such things.

"Mother just picks them up—she has an eye for such stuff," her son explained, "but she has to go slowly because she hasn't sufficient capital to branch out as she'd like. Only an occasional customer is allowed in here. She isn't really anxious to sell. She isn't ready. She's collecting, and some day, when her col-

lection warrants it, she plans to open an antique shop and make a killing."

"She could do it, too," replied Boyd senior; "she has a fine start, and there's money in turning over merchandise like this."

"I call it junk," replied the son. "It doesn't interest me very much. It doesn't seem to me like real business—manufacturing, you know, or something like that."

"This would not suit me, either," replied the father; "but just the same I find it most illuminating. It has made me realize what a good business woman your mother really is. It has made me understand why she had to run away from me—and from the life that I gave her and that I thought ought to satisfy any woman."

"Ye-es," responded Boyd junior, "she's wonderful all right. This was only a little post card shop when it was left to her."

His father noted the hopelessness in his son's voice—saw it in his eyes, and in the sudden dejected sagging of the broad shoulders, and he understood.

"As I've told you," his son continued, trying to be fair and just, "she has made a good living for us both—she sent me to college—and then to a good business college that I might have a first class business training. She is confident that I can carry on the work where she leaves it and make money enough to satisfy any reasonable man. And it never occurs to her that I might not care to do so. She has worked hard—very hard—for me—and I'm a beast to complain—"

"Son, don't you worry any more about it. I'm going to use the tools your mother forged for herself, to set you free." Boyd senior chuckled like a mischievous boy as his mind played with the idea. "We won't let her know that we've had this talk," he said. "You keep out of it. I think I know exactly how to deal with this situation."

CHAPTER XX.

Doris Marie was bored. Even her studies no longer interested her. This was principally because she had gone so far ahead of her fellow students that there was no longer a question of rivalry between them, and that deprived her of one of her strongest incentives to study. And she was being taken too much for granted by her instructors, who saw no reason why they should keep repeating the flattering remarks that she earned, but which had become worn from repetition. Doris Marie still had her halo, but it had become commonplace. It attracted little attention, and it was no longer a novelty even to herself. And so she longed for new fields to conquer. A devoted attendant would have made life more endurable, for she longed to dance, and would have enjoyed a petting party; but young men still held themselves aloof. They were still afraid of Doris Marie.

When Doris Marie spoke of her condition to her parents, she did so with wonderful tact. She led them to declare that she must be ill, and then she admitted, as if it didn't really matter, that possibly they might be right about it. Without appearing to have done so, she had deftly planted in their minds the fear that their darling child was in danger of a nervous breakdown. Her manner conveyed the idea that so far as she was concerned it didn't matter much to her what she had—life wasn't worth living anyhow—but she appeared as one who realized her danger, but who was too brave to admit the worst—a rather patient and pathetic little sufferer. They believed that she had studied too hard, and declared that what she had learned could not compensate her for her evident loss in physical well-being.

Doris Marie, as was her usual custom, kept her real thoughts to herself. Joe-Anne was the only one of all her friends to

whom she frankly confided the fact that she was bored—not ill at all, as her parents were telling their friends—just bored. She told Joe-Anne that it seemed to her as if she had tried everything in the world that gave any promise of being worth while, and had found it all stale, disappointing and unprofitable. And Joe-Anne replied that, after reviewing the past year of her friend's life, she was not surprised to hear her conclusions. She declared that no girl could be really happy who was not married and desperately in love with her husband. This was said seriously. Joe-Anne believed it, and she was doing her best to make Doris Marie believe it, also. She thought Doris Marie might fall in love—if only she realized how necessary love was to happiness—and that her life would then be worth living. Joe-Anne believed that Fate had been unnecessarily hard on Doris Marie; but when she said so to Dicky he changed the subject. What he really thought about it was that Doris Marie was suffering from an attack of conscience, because it stood to reason that she must sooner or later recognize the fact that she had never played fair with any member of his sex. But there was no complaining conscience at the root of Doris Marie's attack of boredom. While she had frequently reviewed her various love episodes she failed to find herself to blame for anything that had happened. The trouble, in her opinion, lay in the fact that boys were so effeminate they couldn't possibly be treated as men. They didn't inspire respect. They lacked self-respect. They only took up room that might better be left vacant. They were useful as dancing partners, but that was all. It didn't matter what one did to them, they deserved it all and more too. She believed that her influence should have had a beneficial effect on those whom she had deigned to play about with and that it would have done so had it not been for the present generation of ineffectual parents, who brought up their sons to cling to the parental roof as long as they could without being expected to exert themselves in any way.

Doris Marie realized that she was ready for a change of environment, and she believed she could manage to get it if she could come a little closer to the appearance of nervous breakdown. She had read up on the symptoms, and found that no two cases were alike, and all called for a temperamental make-up—which was not hard to assume, especially to one who already was gifted in that direction. She wept without reason—something quite foreign to her nature—she moped about almost constantly, she managed to lose her appetite and in consequence looked thinner, and she told of many nights when she could not sleep at all. She got up in the morning feeling a little headachy—so she said, pathetically—“nothing to worry about, mother dear—perhaps it will soon disappear.” She was so sweet and meek these days when she spoke to her parents—so very patient—and they, poor things, began really to believe that their peppery little daughter was soon to become an angel. They consulted the family physician who had assisted in bringing her into the world, and who had always done his full share in the joyful task of spoiling her, and their anxiety prevented them from observing that he was not as surprised and anxious as he had been on other occasions when they had consulted him about her. They did not know that their daughter had already seen him and prepared him for their visit—a fact which would have astonished them beyond measure, because they had been most careful not to let their little invalid suspect that they were worried enough to talk with the doctor about her case.

The doctor knew exactly what to say. Doris Marie had told him, and she had succeeded in convincing him that her plan for herself was far better than any that either he or her parents could have devised. Doris Marie wanted to go abroad—and she did not want her parents to go with her. There was to be a party of twelve girls chaperoned by a school teacher whom they all knew, and she had decided to be one of that party. She liked Miss Morris, the teacher, and Miss Morris liked her.

She could do pretty much as she pleased when chaperoned by Miss Morris.

Doris Marie's wish was granted. It had been decided without any apparent intervention on her part that her health demanded an ocean voyage, and that her nerves demanded youthful society, and that a complete change of environment was all that was needed to bring her back to what she had been before the several disastrous episodes,—headed by her broken engagement with Sidney, and including the mysterious disappearance of Boyd Hunter—had made of the past year a season of trials that were enough to wreck the spirits of anyone. It had been easy to get this wish granted. She was going abroad with a party of girls and a chaperone who had had experience in taking small parties of girls to desirable places. Doris Marie was secretly overjoyed because she felt quite sure that Miss Morris could be depended upon to be satisfactorily complaisant where she was concerned. She would do the rest.

What did she want to do that even the strictest chaperone might not approve? She hadn't the least idea. All she was sure of was that she was not at all likely to want to do anything that appealed to the majority. She was like that. She didn't know what she had hoped for from this trip—except that it offered an opportunity to get away from much that she was finding disagreeable—but she was longing—longing intensely—for some experience that would be absolutely new to her, and perhaps different from any that any other girl had known. Simply crossing the ocean would not give her that, unless they were shipwrecked and she were quite startlingly saved; for this was not her first trip abroad. Her graduation gift had been a trip to most of the capital cities of Europe.

Doris Marie was depressed when she left the steamer. She felt, when the little party reached Paris, and had been assigned to their respective rooms in one of the few really American hotels that city had to offer, that she had done all this before—and she realized that she was just as bored as she had been

when she left home—that she'd be obliged to go with the party on the same old dismal round of sight seeing, and that the trip she had worked so cleverly to secure did not hold one single thrill for her. She simply could not stand it. She would not stand it—so there! She'd got to find something interesting to think about, or she'd go crazy. And she'd got to find it for herself. Not one person in her party could be depended upon to find any joy in the unusual. Might as well recognize that fact right now—proclaim her independence—see the sights in her own way.

“This is a good time to visit that quaint little art gallery I was telling you about—you remember? That darling little out-of-the-way place?” Miss Morris was speaking with customary enthusiasm, and the members of her party were assenting with their accustomed air of eagerness—all except Doris Marie.

“My head aches,” she announced, lengthening her features as she had learned how to do so as to deceive even her doctor—drawing down the corners of her mouth, withdrawing all the sparkle from her eyes—wearing the air of a patient little sufferer. It worked. “My head aches awfully. If you don't mind I'll stay in my room and sleep the pain off. No, no,” intercepting alarming offers of companionship, “there's nothing to worry about. I'm subject to these attacks. I get over them much more quickly if I can be left quite alone. I'd feel so unhappy if I deprived one of you from enjoying everything this wonderful trip has in store for you.”

“But what about luncheon?” asked the businesslike Miss Morris; “we don't want to leave you to eat alone—yet we can have the pictures almost to ourselves if we go during the luncheon hour.”

“What had you planned to do about luncheon?” asked Doris Marie.

"We'd be too late to get it here. I had thought we might pick up a little snack at the funniest little cafe near the art gallery—but you won't be with us."

"I shall not want any luncheon," declared Doris Marie. "The very thought of food makes me feel worse. You go as you had planned, do everything just as you had planned it. Please. That will make me happy. If I get hungry I have plenty of fruit—as you can see—" indicating a basket on the table near her bed, "and perhaps I'll lose a few ounces in weight if I don't eat anything else until dinner time."

And so Doris Marie was left alone, and her health improved quite surprisingly—to one who didn't know her very well. Ten minutes after she had assured herself that her friends had left the hotel, she got up and dressed. An hour later she was on the street. She would have a nice long walk, all by herself, and if she saw any indications of an interesting episode, she would be free to pursue it with no unwilling companion to attempt to dissuade her—thereby spoiling everything.

A lady whom she had met on the steamer had given her the address of a quaint little curio shop known as "Mary's Shoppe" which was absolutely "different" and which she must not miss. Doris Marie decided that she'd visit that shop this morning, and if she found it really different she could tell Miss Morris about it, and have some of the thrills of a discoverer. No reason why Miss Morris should have a corner on that brand of thrills!

She found the shop without difficulty, but just before she crossed the street to enter the quaint door under the quaintly lettered sign "Mary's Shoppe" she was rendered absolutely motionless by an apparition. Boydicum—her Boydicum stood in that doorway! And as he turned away, to walk up the street, another Boydicum came through that same doorway, and turned to walk beside him! They walked along together,

shoulder to shoulder, and there was no way for her to tell which was her Boydicum and which the apparition—or did her eyes deceive her, and was she seeing double? She must find out. Her health and happiness depended upon her finding out all there was to know about this most curious experience. If both the men should dissolve into thin air—disappear utterly as was to be expected of apparitions—she would return to the curio shop and try to learn why they had appeared to come out of that door. Then she would report to the Psychical Society, and one of the interesting episodes she had so ardently desired would be written up, and the longed-for thrill of the discoverer would be hers beyond any doubt. Life had once more become worth living. Her intuitions had not led her astray. She knew, now, why she had been so determined to make this trip. Already she was well repaid for the tiresome days of feigned illness.

While these thoughts were flitting through her busy brain, Doris Marie was following the two men at a discreet distance, and studying them as carefully as that distance allowed. They led her a long way—almost two miles—and she was feeling rather tired when at last they turned into a little well-kept yard on the outskirts of the city, and entered a pretty vine-covered cottage and closed the door behind them.

What was she to do now? She walked past the cottage, turned and walked back—did this several times—and then reached her decision. This wasn't getting her anywhere. She'd got to know why Boydicum was here—why there were two of him—why he had not written—as he should have done when to all intents and purposes she was still engaged to be married to him. That engagement had never been broken. She assured herself, quite feverishly, that she had never seriously considered anyone else. The other playmates of the past year had simply been episodes—something to help her pass the time while Boydicum was absent.

She had reached this decision—the next time she passed that door, she would knock for admittance. She had arrived. She entered the little yard, mounted the three steps to the inviting porch, and knocked. A cheerful voice—a woman’s voice—called to her to enter. She pushed the door open, and stood on the threshold. There stood Boydicum, close to an elderly woman who was sewing a button on his vest, which he had not taken the trouble to remove. The woman looked up and smiled. Boydicum looked too dazed for words—was, in fact in an even more serious condition than that expression implies, for in all his dread forebodings of a lonely and altogether hellish future, he had never once dreamed of anything like this.

“Hello, Boydicum!” exclaimed Doris Marie. She made it sound almost casual, because she was herself quite dazed by the encounter, and couldn’t think of anything more dramatic to say—anyhow, nothing as dramatic as the case demanded.

“Well, Doris Marie!” Boyd had gotten a tiny hold on life once more, and was appearing almost normal. He took a step forward, and held out a trembling hand. She took the hand in one of hers, put her other hand on his shoulder, drew him toward her, reached up and kissed him.

“Boydicum,” she said, reproachfully, “why did you do it?”

“Doris Marie,” he stammered, “let me present my wife. Mary, this is Miss Doris Marie Palmer—”

“Your wife!” exclaimed Doris Marie, rudely, “your mother, perhaps. What’s the matter with you, Boydicum? Been having an attack of paresis?”

Boyd, senior, was saved from replying by the entrance of Boyd, junior, who had gone to his room immediately upon entering the cottage, and whom, for the moment, Doris Marie had quite forgotten. His appearance produced an effect on her quite similar to that she had thought she had detected in Boydicum when she entered. She was certainly suffering from a form of paralysis that was affecting muscular motion, but not sensation. She stood rooted to the spot, her eyes wide and

full of fear, her mouth half open, her heart hammering. What ailed her? What did she think she was seeing? Of course there couldn't be two of anyone! No one had ever heard that Boyd was a twin—but perhaps he was—the idea unlocked her stiffened tongue.

"Boydicum," she stammered, "why didn't you say there were two of you—I mean, twins?"

"Doris Marie," faltered Boyd, senior, "allow me to introduce my son. Boydie, this is Miss Palmer, of New York, daughter of the lawyer who takes charge of my affairs."

"Glad to know you, Miss Palmer," said Boyd, junior heartily. "Have a seat, won't you? Evidently dad and mother forgot to mention it."

Doris Marie was glad to be seated. She was trembling so that she could hardly stand. She had longed for an experience out of the ordinary, and it had been accorded her—but who could have dreamed of anything like this! She had longed for a thrill, she thought, but not for a knock-out. She dropped into the easy chair Boyd, junior, found for her with the lack of grace—the absurd laxity—of a rag doll. She felt like a rag doll. She didn't feel at all sure that she was not dreaming. Even pinching didn't quite assure her on that point. She had once dreamed of pinching herself, and it had hurt just about as badly. Finally, her nerves really gave way, and she burst into tears—wept so violently that her little audience became alarmed.

"Better leave her with me," suggested Mrs. Hunter, and the two men left the room.

Boyd, junior, was vibrant with curiosity. He had never been told of his father's episode with Doris Marie. He was anxious to know more about the girl. She wasn't exactly what one would call beautiful—but she looked interesting. What did his father think ailed her? Why was she crying like that? Why did she call his father by that absurd name? Had her father gotten into trouble—perhaps absconded with a portion

of his father's funds—was that what she had come to say?

Boyd, senior, realized that an unhappy—a disagreeable conference was in store for him. He had a confession to make that could no longer be postponed. The unexpected appearance of Doris Marie had served another purpose also. It convinced him that he could no longer procrastinate. He must now decide what he would do about returning to New York and his business. Did he care to face the music when Doris Marie had made public the story that his wife was doubtless telling her at this very moment?

The two men had drifted into Boyd, junior's room, and the younger man was sitting facing his father. His eyes were bright, eager, inquiring. There was no putting him off. The father saw no chance to "cut and run." He began his story.

Boyd, junior, listened quietly—endeavored to conceal his amazement. He had been told how his father chanced to appear so absurdly young, and had been sorry for him. "What a fool it must make him feel," he had thought, and he was in full sympathy with his father's hatred of Hicks Jarou. But to be told that the old man had actually passed himself off as his own son—had tried to go about with the young people—had become engaged to be married to a mere child—why the poor old duffer must be crazy! But of course he couldn't tell him that. What in time could he say! His father was evidently feeling horribly ashamed—he ought to try to comfort him. But how? A situation so impossible, so undignified, so absurd—

CHAPTER XXI.

A peal of unrestrained laughter rang through the little cottage. It brought the trying conference between father and son to an abrupt close. They sat up stiffly, as if bracing themselves for something even more disagreeable than their conference had been, and exchanged troubled glances that proclaimed the satisfactory degree of understanding they had reached. The father's confession had made a real pal for him—his son understood and sympathized, and because of that he no longer belonged entirely to his mother.

The laughter seemed never ending—peal upon peal, rising almost to a scream—sounding almost maniacal. Doris Marie had swung from hysterical weeping into hysterical laughter, and she was doing the job thoroughly.

"Wonder if mother needs any help with that wildcat," murmured Boyd, junior, half rising from his seat as if to go to her. His father waved an authoritative hand—indicated that it would be wiser for him not to interfere.

"Your mother will know what to do," he said with conviction.

"But that girl sounds crazy. I believe she is crazy. She may become violent."

"She won't. I know her. This will act as her safety valve. She'll come out of it as serene as a June morning. No need to worry about her—and if your mother needs help she will send for me."

Boyd, junior, looked his astonishment. "For you!" he repeated: "oh, no, Dad, she has always relied on me."

"She won't this time. You'll see. She will decide that it is up to me to take my punishment—and between them they can administer it—good and plenty."

Boyd, junior, grinned; so did his father. The son's grin told of youthful appreciation of a horribly amusing situation—something good for hours of laughter when once matters had been straightened out—but not now. Just now he really felt sorry for poor old dad, and must restrain his mirth. The father's grin was rueful. He was already apprehending the agonies of a future that to a man of his nature—with his pitiful shrinking under criticism—his dread of ridicule—his servility to custom—his knowledge of the extent to which he had cheapened himself—his desire for the respect of his fellow man, seemed beyond endurance.

"Of course mother must realize," said the son, "that this unexpected visit can't be exactly easy for you to bear. I don't believe she'll be hard on you. Mother has a lot of good commonsense; she won't go up in the air over this."

"If she doesn't understand—without explanation—I don't see how anything I could say—would really help—do you?"

"Oh, you can't explain," interrupted the son, "no man could. It is a situation so out of the ordinary—" He was speaking rather vaguely, because he realized that he could not see the situation from his father's viewpoint at all. And that was partially due to the fact that he had never for one moment thought of his father as a young man, notwithstanding his absurdly youthful appearance. He knew he was a man of seventy, no matter how he looked. His appearance of youth was something to regret, because it made him ridiculous, and the son was as sorry about it as he would have been had he found his father bent and crippled from rheumatism. It was awful for the poor old duffer to have to go about with a face like a cherub, and hair like a halo, and to know that this was a disease that only time could heal. It was fun, in a way, for him to walk out with a father who looked like a twin brother—but the poor old man must feel terrible to know how grotesque he was and always must be; it couldn't be any fun for him. What the son couldn't understand was how a sensible man of seventy years

could for one moment have contemplated matrimony with a girl young enough to be his grand-daughter. And it had not been a case of love—his father was not senile enough for that—he really was not senile at all—he was a man whom any son could admire. He had studied the old man carefully, while he was telling his story, and he knew he had never been in love with that little flapper. He had appeared angry and ashamed and harassed, and rather patient—just about as a fellow might feel if the pet dog he had chloroformed and left for dead had suddenly returned, and he realized that he'd have the distressing job to do all over again. "That's exactly the way this girl's appearance made him feel," mused his son, "and I'm darned sorry for him, even though it is to laugh!"

The laughter in the adjoining room ended in a long wail, and Boyd, junior, thought his pet-dog simile was rather good. Then came another period of violent sobbing, and this was followed by more of the insane laughter. There was an attempt at explanation—they heard the words, "how could I know he wasn't what he seemed," and then another burst of tears—less violent—and the exclamation—"an old made-over man," followed by more laughter. The motherly voice of Mrs. Hunter was occasionally heard, soothing, exhorting, even scolding—and then came quiet. The men now talked together in low tones, as if not to disturb that silence, which they found most refreshing. They talked together of the New York business, and of old Stafford, and of the rebuilt and redecorated old home—and both were interested.

"I have put her to bed—in my room," said Mrs. Hunter, who had appeared at the son's door so quietly that her voice actually startled them. "We must send word to her chaperone that she is with friends, and will not return until late in the evening. By that time, I think she will have gained a modicum of self-control."

"Shall I go to the hotel?" asked her husband.

"No, I have a note written. Call a messenger, please."

"You look utterly spent, Mother; you ought to have slapped that young hyena and sent her about her business. The idea of her coming here and staging a fit like that!"

Her son spoke with such indignation—he showed such concern for her welfare—that the mother smiled happily. She realized that as yet no girl who made his mother suffer could interest her boy. A glow crept into her tired face, her eyes looked young, and she became actually beautiful. She laid her grey head on her son's shoulder for a moment, and reached up to pat his cheek.

"Don't be hard on the poor child, Boydie," she said: "we must remember that she had some excuse for her demonstration—and really—" with a glance at her husband who was looking the picture of discomfort—"really, she did not feel as badly as she sounded. She is just one of our modern American girls who have not been taught the beauty and desirability of either self-respect or self-control."

"Well, let's forget her," replied the son, easily, "and think of luncheon. I'm about starved." He was leading her down to the sitting room—his arm about her waist.

"It is late," the mother admitted, wearily; "shall we go out somewhere—"

"We'll go out into the kitchen," interrupted her son, firmly. "You can stay in the sitting-room and rest," he added, "and I'll cook, and dad can set the table. I saw cake in the pantry. Dad can cut that, and slice the bread, and open a can of peaches and get the butter, and I'll make the coffee and stir up some scrambled eggs with chopped ham—I saw the makin's out there and know whereof I speak."

"And let me make a potato stew, won't you please," asked a plaintive voice from the doorway. "P-l-e-a-s-e" she repeated, and smiled her most engaging smile. There stood Doris Marie, looking as if nothing unpleasant had happened—at least nothing of any great importance—and her manner was that of one who had a right to consider herself a welcome member of the

family. She had been naughty—perhaps—but she had done nothing unforgivable—and now she was quite ready to be her most charming self, and saw no reason why anyone should show surprise.

“Oh, my dear,” expostulated Mrs. Hunter, hastily, “we’re glad to have you for luncheon, of course, but we couldn’t think of allowing you to work—”

“Why not? I love to cook, and I do make the very spiffiest potato stew you ever put into your mouth; I do, don’t I, Boydi— I mean, Mr. Hunter.”

“The child really does know how to cook,” said Boyd, senior, to his wife, quite briefly, then he hastened into the dining room and began to set the table.

“And I’m simply starved for a good old-fashioned American luncheon,” went on Doris Marie eagerly—“and I’m all over that ghastly attack of hysterics, Mrs. Hunter; I’m ashamed of that. I do want you to believe that I never did throw a fit like that before, never. Won’t you let me make some potato stew?”

“Why, of course, if you insist. I was planning to make some baking powder biscuits,” she lied, “and we have some excellent raspberry jam—”

“We don’t need the jam,” interrupted her son. “We’ll eat the biscuits with my scrambled eggs—”

“And my potato stew—”

“Come on, folks,” interrupted Boyd junior; “dad must have the table nearly ready.” He led the way singing:

“We’re off to the kitchen, hurrah, hurrah;

We’re off to the kitchen, Mamma.

We’ll cook in our kitchen, but don’t you tell pa,

For he’d not believe it, now would he, Mamma?”

Doris Marie laughed. “Where did you pick up that awful noise,” she inquired, looking about and finding a large towel which she pinned around her to protect her dress—“and do you know where your mother keeps the potatoes and things?”

Mrs. Hunter was vexed and amused. She would have given

much to send that surprising girl away immediately, and to be able to do it so peremptorily that she'd never dare return—but she did not know how to go about it. She really knew very little of the modern girl, except what she had gleaned through the newspapers and magazines—and she had a secret fear of all girls. She knew that some day a girl would appear and Boydie—her son—who now belonged exclusively to her—

But Doris Marie was claiming her attention.

“You mustn't think, Mrs. Hunter,” she said, as she deftly pared potatoes, “that your husband was in any way to blame for what happened between us. I simply went after him with my mouth wide open. He hadn't a chance. No man has when a girl is determined, you know—and I liked him because he was so different from the boys in our bunch, who are about as selfish and useless and uninteresting as anything the good Lord ever invented. They all called Boydi—Mr. Hunter—a nice old maid,—and so did I; but I really liked him because he was so darned decent. I can see, now, that he was really true to you all the time—but the poor chap must have been the loneliest thing under the sun—to have to live alone all those years, in that dingy old house—no wonder I gave him a hope that at last he might have a real home. And that was what I wanted, too—a real home.”

“But surely you must have known men nearer your own age. He was—at best—even thinking of him as only thirty years old—”

“I'm twenty-one,” said Doris Marie. “I wouldn't think of marrying a man who wasn't ten years older than I am. I couldn't look up to any of the boys of about my age. You know, Mrs. Hunter, girls do still dream of marrying men whom they can respect, although they know there 'ain't no sich animile,—not really. I do hope I've seasoned this potato stew to suit your taste—and I have, if you've not gone over entirely to French notions about cooking.”

Luncheon was served, and a rather embarrassed little company seated themselves around the table. Doris Marie was really the most composed member of the party, and that was due to the fact that she never attempted to ignore anything actually existent, no matter how disagreeable it might be, never tried to white-wash a situation, and had no belief in deception as a way out of trouble. "Own up—take the consequences—do better next time—be a good sport—" that was her creed.

"When are you going back to New York?" she asked Mr. Hunter, quite unexpectedly.

"I am not planning to go back at all," was his unexpected reply, and his wife looked at him—surprised and startled. "Stafford is getting on very well without me," he continued, "and when he wishes to retire, I am hoping my son will decide to carry on the business."

"Not Boydie!" gasped Mrs. Hunter, "you are not thinking of sending Boydie to New York?"

"Why not? Isn't that what you have wanted? Wasn't that your reason for interfering in my plans?" His wife looked confused—could not reply. She suddenly saw how she was to be caught in the net of her own weaving.

"I think dad's business really belongs to me," said Boyd, junior, with enthusiasm. "It would be mine—anyhow—when dad—but of course he'll not do that—as things have turned out. He looks as if he might outlive me by a good many years."

"We won't make it a question of inheritance," replied the father, quietly. "I do not care to return to New York. When you are ready to take up the business, you have only to say so."

"Am I not to be considered at all," inquired Mrs. Hunter. "Boydie is all I have—"

"You can't own him, body and soul," replied her husband; "I am sure you would not wish to do that. You have realized only too well how important it is that the individual should live his own life—and that you still believe that to be important

you have made quite clear to me. Our son must be free. I can give him a good start in business—but you can do better than that by him, for you can give him his freedom.”

Mrs. Hunter was trapped so unexpectedly that she could not defend herself. Husband and son exchanged glances of comprehension. She caught the silent interchange and understood.

“If my son is not satisfied,” she said with dignity, “if he really longs for the life you offer him, rest assured I shall not interfere.” But they knew she did not believe he would so decide.

“A business soon runs down when its owners pay no attention to it,” said Doris Marie, sagely. She was quoting her father, but she made it sound like her own idea, and it served to cover Mrs. Hunter’s very evident confusion and give her an opportunity to regain her composure. “That Stafford may be as efficient as he thinks he is—but all the same he is only an employee. He exasperated me nearly to tears.” She did not explain how, but hastened to add, “Why don’t you go back to New York, and look after it yourself, Mr. Hunter, until mother’s boy is ready to leave the downy nest? I know this sounds like butting in, but if anyone outside your family could have that privilege, surely I’m entitled to it.”

Boyd, junior, had flushed angrily, and his mother looked troubled, when Doris Marie had called him “mother’s boy!” Mrs. Hunter didn’t quite like the sound of that herself—and her good sense told her that it was not undeserved, for she could see that her son appeared too young for his years. She had allowed him no responsibilities—yet she hated this girl for the implied criticism in her comment.

Mother’s boy. Suppose that name were to cling to him, and make him unhappy! And when this disagreeable girl had so quickly bestowed it upon him—and she, herself had to admit that it fitted—yes, it was time for her boy to be given his freedom.

Boyd, senior, was getting more satisfaction out of the turn affairs had taken than he would have believed possible. He wanted his wife to be made a little unhappy; he believed it would tend to make her more just to their son—but of course, it couldn't go on too long. He turned to Doris Marie.

"You ask why I do not go back," he said. "Well, there are several reasons, one of which is that New York no longer interests me. Europe has more to offer that a man of my years can appreciate. I can live quite comfortably on what I have—and still not make the financial end of the business too hard for my son—and if I desire I can find some occupation that will add to my income and fill my time."

"Of course you are considering what folks will say about you," said Doris Marie, reflectively, "and I don't wonder. They'll say a plenty, believe me. I'm thinking about that, too,— what won't they say to me! I've good cause to squirm; but why side-step? Why not tell the truth, and take what's coming, and laugh so much harder than the other fellow can that you'll have him walloped before he gets started? That's what I'm going to do."

"Yes?" queried Boyd, senior, politely.

"I see what you mean," responded Doris Marie, suddenly thoughtful. "I am thinking only of myself. That's what you want to say. And that isn't fair of me, is it? Well, after all, I don't have to tell your secret. There's another way out. We can just pretend that I broke our engagement—and that you've been suffering from loss of memory—it wouldn't be difficult to fix up a story if you really want to keep up the camouflage—and when your son is ready you can quietly exchange places—and what he does that's queer will be laid to loss of memory—"

"Not on your life," interrupted Boyd, junior. "When I go—if I go—it will be as myself. And I can tell dad's story without casting any reflections on his intelligence. I'm not a bit ashamed of what he has done, and neither need he be. Take any man with cancer—and he'd try anything—anything

to get well. Thank God dad did get well! As for the rest—what followed—he was not responsible for that.”

“Thank you, my son,” said Boyd, senior, with considerably more emotion than he liked to display.

“He sure wasn’t responsible for what I did to him,” added Doris Marie—“except that it would never have been done if I had known how old he was. Of course he didn’t know, himself, that he had a wife—poor fellow—”

Boyd, junior, interrupted. He feared that Doris Marie was about to direct criticism toward his mother, and he did not propose to stand for that. “Why not let the matter rest,” he said, “and talk about something pleasant. I’m in no hurry to go to New York—and the business doesn’t need me. Besides, I’m not anxious to leave mother. You have called me mother’s boy,” he added, turning to Doris Marie and giving her his most charming smile, “and I want to thank you for the compliment. I can’t think of anything more desirable than to be recognized as my mother’s boy.”

“Won’t you help me to a little more of that potato stew,” asked Mrs. Hunter of her husband. “It is simply delicious.”

“Isn’t it?” asked Doris Marie with animation. She wanted to act on Boydie’s suggestion that they talk of something pleasant. “Do you know,” she added, “my mother hasn’t the first idea that I know how to cook?”

“She hasn’t? You surprise me,” responded Mrs. Hunter.

“Cooks won’t let anyone fuss around in their kitchens,” explained Doris Marie—“I mean cooks in America. They’d leave without giving warning. Why, unless a woman is very, very tactful, even when mentioning matters that she really has a right to direct, her cook will leave—no matter if she has a big formal dinner on hand, and the guests are arriving. She just leaves. And in these days, one must have servants—unless one can train the members of the family to help out. That’s the kind of home I’d like—where everyone helps, and one can get really acquainted with one’s family.”

"I can't imagine any other kind of home," said Mrs. Hunter, unguardedly.

"I can," replied Mr. Hunter, significantly; "no, on second thought, I can't, it wasn't a home. The kind of home Doris Marie describes is the only real home—where every member has his place, and a duty to perform, and where enforced companionship leads to mutual understanding and mutual helpfulness."

"Well, Mother, time to draw lots," announced Boyd, junior.

"For what purpose?" inquired Doris Marie, instantly curious.

"To see which of us must do the dishes. That is one of the most solemn rites of our household."

"I am going to do them myself—without help from anyone," she said decisively. "The rest of you can go into the sitting-room and talk—and after I've washed the dishes, I'm going to the hotel, and sneak up to my room, and have a good rest before anyone expects me. I'm going to get Doris Marie Palmer all nicely straightened out, and I'm not going to tell a single soul how to find this place."

And thus it transpired that the little meal that had been begun so unhappily, was finished in a way that promised some degree of happiness for each one who had been present.

CHAPTER XXII.

The time Miss Morris had allotted for the stay of her little party in Paris had nearly expired. They were leaving early the next morning for Switzerland, and Doris Marie was spending a portion of this last day in getting luncheon in Mrs. Hunter's home. She was working hard to have everything in readiness when the family returned from the shop.

"I'll show that young man," she was thinking, happily, "that he hasn't any real knowledge of the art of scrambling eggs. Mine are going to be absolutely spiffy! And these muffins—m-m-m-yum! I'll tell the world I am one born cook."

Boyd junior entered the kitchen, hastily, and stopped, transfixed. "How in time did you get in?" he demanded.

"I noticed where your mother hid her door-key. I found it and used it. Where is your mother?"

"Coming. I hurried on ahead to get things started."

"I beat you to it. Look the table over, won't you, and see if I've forgotten anything. And say, Boydicum—"

Boyd, junior had started toward the dining room, but like a flash he turned and came back, standing before her severe and menacing.

"Don't you dare call me that," he said; "never again; understand?"

Doris Marie giggled, but she didn't look quite comfortable because the young man was not smiling—because he looked as if he meant much more than he said—because he actually looked contemptuous. She didn't know exactly why he was looking contemptuous—or how he dared do it, and she quickly decided to make him understand that she didn't propose to let him browbeat her, and she wished him to know that she called anyone she knew anything she pleased, and when young men criticized her, they usually regretted it.

"Why not," she parried, mischievously; "I think Boydicum is a very nice name, and it fits you, too. I invented it myself, and I don't care to drop it."

"I will not be nicknamed—like a pet puppy. It is not dignified, or in any way desirable. I will not stand for it. You will either call me by my name, or you needn't speak to me at all."

"What a silly fuss over nothing!"

"It means something to me."

"Suppose I decide to do as I please—call you what I please—I've been known to do that—and the name stuck."

"If you try that on me I shall consider it an indication that you no longer care to know me."

"And then you'd try to ignore me, I suppose."

"I should ignore you."

"Remember, you are going to New York, some day—to New York, where I am pretty well acquainted, and you haven't a friend."

"I intend to choose my friends wherever I go, and not simply be introduced to yours. In fact, I'm not thinking of your set at all."

"I can make you mighty uncomfortable, if you're hateful to my friends."

"Oh, no, you can't. You see, I don't care a picayune what any of your set thinks about me. I have an idea that I shall not like any of them very much—that they have nothing to offer in the way of companionship that will interest me—that I can use my time to better advantage than by hopping about with them looking for something new in the way of excitement."

"They'll call you hopelessly mid-Victorian; you'll see."

"I shan't care a whoop what they call me. Can't you understand how futile and spineless those young sprouts must appear to a man who dares to think for himself?"

"You really don't know anything about the modern young people."

"Don't I though! Think I've never observed any of them over here—traveling as a means of finishing an education they haven't acquired—seeing nothing but the most comfortable hotels and the most notorious brothels—seeking nothing except all they want to drink—thinking of nothing but to secure what they call a good time?"

"They are not all like that."

"I hope you're right about it—but what you've told me during the past week, while we've been sight-seeing together, has led me to conclude that you don't know many young people whom I'd care to waste my time cultivating."

"Don't you like me?"

"Well enough—not particularly. You're fun to run around with, occasionally, but you'd get on my nerves if I saw too much of you. You're like a mixture of India relish, horse-radish and tabasco sauce."

"Frankly brutal," commented Doris Marie, satirically.

"You asked me, you know. And you have assured me that absolute frankness is demanded by the present generation of young people. Didn't you mean what you said?"

"Ye-es, I suppose so."

"Well, then?"

Doris Marie drew a deep breath, and grinned. She was a true little sport, and she realized that she had received exactly what she deserved.

"Mr. Boyd Hunter, junior," she said demurely, "is that table all right, and where are your parents? The eats are ready for consumption, and they are absolutely spiffy."

Mr. and Mrs. Hunter had been sitting in the little sun room adjoining the dining room. They had heard most of the above quoted conversation. They had deliberately listened, as a means of learning whether or not their son was in danger.

"Well," said Mrs. Hunter, with satisfaction, "I can see that

I have given my boy something very desirable that that girl has not been given. Notwithstanding the fact that I am a business woman, I believe that I've been an efficient mother."

"It was not a bad thing for the boy," replied her husband, "that he had to help you earn a living."

"I can see, now," continued the mother, "that an undisciplined, jazzy girl like that cannot hurt him."

Doris Marie chanced to overhear that and the mother's tone of satisfaction infuriated her. In the tenth part of a second the good little girl turned into a silent little fury, whose quick mind was already evolving plans for a complete and satisfactory revenge. "Undisciplined! Jazzy!" she thought; "she makes it sound as if she believed me to be possessed of at least a dozen devils. Very well, my lady!"

Mr. Hunter made no response to his wife's remark, nor did he permit himself to smile; but he thought to himself that his wife did not understand Doris Marie as well as she thought she did, and that there was no guessing what influence the girl was likely to have on their son. Had he known that she had overheard his wife's complacent remark to the effect that the girl could not hurt her boy,—overheard the criticism of herself—he would have been decidedly anxious, knowing Doris Marie's ability to exact pay for fancied insults. Could the son cope with her better than he had done?

It was while they were enjoying the very delicious luncheon Doris Marie had prepared, that the irrepressible young lady shot her first bolt. She had planned her campaign of revenge—and she looked as demure and innocent as a baby.

"Do you know," she said, "I'm thinking of going into business."

"Yes?" responded Boyd, senior, politely.

"Yes," echoed Doris Marie with emphasis, "going into business. I'm a good cook, as you know. I can learn to cook even better than I do—and that will be going some, believe you

me. I'm going to open a little shop, and serve the daintiest luncheons—everything tip-top and absolutely spiffy."

"Not a bad idea," said Boyd, senior, thoughtfully. "Think your father would stake you?"

"I think so; and if he refuses I have some money of my own I can use—enough to make a start. But really I think it would be a relief to my long-suffering parents to see me settled—get me out of their way. I'm a great source of worry to them; they don't know what to do with me, and they are always in fear that the worst will happen, and scandal will roost on our roof-tree."

"They have my sympathy," murmured Boyd, junior. "If you belonged in my family, I'd be looking for the latest thing in strait-jackets." His eyes were laughing, but he kept his gaze on his plate, and he looked serious enough.

Doris Marie regarded him critically. "Yes," she replied coolly, "strait-jackets! I think that would appeal to you as the only remedy." Then she turned to Mrs. Hunter, leaving the young man grinning rather foolishly. "I'm thinking of taking that little shop adjoining yours," she said. "The tourists who visit you would love to step into my place and get something really good to eat—something that would remind them of home and mother—and of mother's excellent cook. And when I'd established a reputation, the customers who flocked to my shop would become interested in yours. I'd see to that!"

"But your parents would never let you come away here to go into business," gasped Mrs. Hunter. "That is the craziest notion! Why, if you were my daughter—"

"That's the very idea," interrupted Doris Marie, eagerly. "You will be all alone, when your son goes to New York; why not let me live with you? If you'll do that, I know my parents will agree to my plan—especially when I tell them what a wonderful mother you are. And I'll try awfully hard to please you. I can be good company, when I wish to—and remember,

you'll be lonesome, when your son takes over his father's business."

"What have you decided to do about dad?" asked Boyd, junior, caustically. "Since you are settling the fate of our family, won't you allow him to have any interest in mother?"

He was sorry as soon as he had asked the question, and noted the cloud of consternation that spread over the face of both parents, and the look of actual fear that came into their eyes. He guessed that he had touched on a problem that had been worrying them both—a situation that he had assumed would be arranged according to his liking. Of course his father and mother would live together when he left them! That would be the natural thing for them to do. But evidently they had been considering something quite different, and neither had taken the other—or him—into their confidence, and now all was confusion. Darn that girl; she was an impudent meddler.

"Your father couldn't be satisfied just to step in and help out with your mother's business—and she doesn't need him," said Doris Marie, quite practically. "He's got to get into something for himself, and she'll be much happier to have me here under her eyes while you are in New York. She's afraid of my influence—and you are rather unsophisticated, you know. You've been a mamma-boy so many years."

Now Boyd, junior, silently cursed the girl for giving that turn to the conversation. So did his father and mother. But it had afforded them an opportunity to get a good breath, while she sparred with her son. Now if she would only let them alone—

But that was not according to Doris Marie's plan. It was a part of her creed that if a thing needed saying, one should go ahead and say it! If it were obvious, why pretend that it did not exist? If it were embarrassing, why not attack it boldly and relieve it of all unnecessary confusion, and then it would quite naturally take care of itself. Nothing was to

be gained, and all manner of complications might be expected, when one pretended—or tried to pretend, that a spade was not a spade at all, but something so delicate that it had to be wrapped in silk and concealed as long as possible from the vulgar gaze. She was pleased, now, to act according to her creed, and give this self-satisfied woman something to think about, and at the same time mete out the punishment she had earned.

“I know your father fairly well, Mr. Boyd Hunter, junior,” she said, coolly, “and I don’t believe he’d find it possible to hang around here much longer. He is going to have a hard time trying to fit that rejuvenated body in anywhere—but he can’t do it here where your mother is sure to criticise his appearance as absurd—simply because he looks so much younger than she does—”

“I think I’ll go to my room,” faltered Mrs. Hunter; she arose and faced her guest. “Since this is a matter that you do not have to decide, my dear,” she said, giving Doris Marie a little wintry smile, “I need not wait for your conclusions. As I shall probably not see you again, we’ll just say goodbye here and now. And I do hope you will have a very pleasant trip.”

The two men arose as Mrs. Hunter left the room, and there was real anxiety in their eyes as they watched the retreating form. They had never seen her look so old. They showed decided vexation as they followed Doris Marie into the little sun room, and she knew they felt like ordering her out of the house. “I’ll show them!” she thought, angrily, “that they can’t malign me, and get away with it.”

“I have a few minutes left,” she announced cheerfully, “and then I must go and finish my packing. You’re going to miss me like the mischief. Do you know,” she continued, almost without a stop between sentences, and as if what she were about to say had some relation to her packing, “do you know, it is really nice to feel that you’re missed by the aged. Have you ever considered how almost impossible it is even for the more

advanced among the middle-aged to accept modern standards and ideas, when they interfere with personal matters? No matter how convinced you may be that there's something to be said for modern methods of thought, you can't get in tune."

"Meaning what?" asked Boyd, junior, coldly.

"For instance: your mother is peeved because I mentioned a fact that is as plain as the nose on your face. But your father realizes I spoke the truth—he has already had a hard time trying to fit in—and it would be worse if he tagged her about the rest of his life like something that didn't belong. He'll just have to travel—meet new people—keep meeting new people as long as he lives. He'll never fit in anywhere. And you'll go to New York—fact is, you ought to be there now attending to your business—and when you are both gone, your mother will be so darned lonesome that she will wish she had asked me to come to live with her."

"Well, Dad, now we know where we stand! Miss Palmer has told us. Everything is all arranged to our liking, thanks be! Shall we go to the shop? I think mother won't feel like going out again today. And you, Miss Palmer," he added, ironically polite, "may I have the pleasure of seeing you to your hotel?" He had arisen, and looked as if he expected her to leave promptly.

"No," replied Doris Marie, assuming an air that she believed would have been that of a grand dame to whom a menial had offered himself as escort, "no, thanks; I prefer to go alone. And I'll soon be on my way. Suppose you go to the shop and leave your father with me!" Boydie dropped back into his chair. Then she turned to Boyd, senior; "do you know," she said, "it has occurred to me that my Aunt Clara would make a perfect wife for your son. They'd be such congenial old maids—we hardly see anything like them these days. If you think as I do, I shall be glad to arrange their marriage. I think his motto would not be 'cut and run.'"

Both men glared at her now, without attempt to conceal their feelings. They wanted to put her out, but didn't know how. She was certainly showing them her very naughtiest self. And they feared that worse was to follow; but now she had risen and was lighting her cigarette.

"Farewell, boys," she said airily, "until we meet again. If you get lonesome, look me up, do, and try to insult and abuse me some more! Whatever else you do in this old world, do be sure to take good care of yourselves. The world needs you. You'd be missed frightfully if you died."

She blew a kiss toward each from the tips of her rosy fingers, signalled a passing cab, and drove off toward her hotel without further ceremony. When she was safe in the cab—free from observation—she took the mirror from her beauty case and studied her impudent, mutinous, dark little face.

"I wonder," she mused, "if I look as much of a fool as I feel. I wonder if I am as much of a fool as I appear to be. But anyhow I've paid them, with interest. I have that bunch of perfect angels guessing. Those two idiots of unmatched parents will never know how near I came to falling in love with their son—and neither will he, damn him." Then she giggled, and it sounded as jolly and carefree as the laugh of a child.

"My lunch-room," she gasped; "oh, my lunch-room! And they swallowed every word of that story! And my determination to live with his mother—when he wasn't there—oh, boy! what a horrible idea—but it sure didn't sound like the idea of a flapper who was angling for a poor helpless young man—and I had them simply scared stiff. Huh! I could run away with their precious son any minute I decided to try."

She had reached her hotel, and she was so fortunate as not to meet any of her party on the way to her room. Once locked in, she threw herself across her bed and indulged in a storm of tears. She cried just long enough to feel relieved, and not long enough to make her nose red. After which she arose and

did her packing, and soon she was quite ready to start whenever Miss Morris might summon her; then she took a note book from her hand bag and read over what she had written there.

"Not so bad," she said, giggling happily; "I'll let my dear parents see whether or not I got anything worth while out of my studies. They are going to be horribly proud of me before they know it." Then she added a few more paragraphs to her notes, and the longer she worked the happier and better pleased she seemed to be. The notes were headed "Fliers in Love," and were intended, when finished, to appear as her autobiography, in a certain magazine with whose editor she had already had some correspondence concerning them. It was her intention to describe her various swains, in no complimentary manner, and to recount the various incidents that led to her broken engagements. She meant to warn the world that its masculine inhabitants were deteriorating so rapidly that they could no longer be depended upon as rulers, and that women must be trained to fill positions of responsibility. No names were mentioned, but she had shown skill in describing her various lovers, and names were not needed. Her work was delightfully and diabolically clever, and gave an excellent indication of the satirical writer who was one day, not so very distant, to win a place for herself in the literary world,—a really enviable place, too. For Doris Marie was a genius—and temperamental—and yet with commonsense enough to lead her, as the years went by, to restrain her erratic ways,—and then she would be very lovable.

"After all," she thought, as she powdered her nose once more, "it is a good thing for me that I didn't make a hit with Mr. Boyd Hunter, junior; for if he tried I am almost sure he could make me obey him—and I'm a long way, yet, from allowing any man to walk on my bended neck." And Cupid, standing near, grinned cheerfully. He was getting ready to teach Doris Marie that she had a heart.

Doris Marie returned to New York firmly convinced that Boyd Hunter, Jr. could make her obey him,—if he decided to attempt it—and that she would never, never place herself where she'd have to obey any man. She congratulated herself on the fact that Boyd Hunter, Jr. did not like her at all—and would never speak to her again, unless she got him where he couldn't help himself—something she would never, never do. She would have been very much surprised could she have known how mistaken she was with respect to the young man's opinion of her. He had guessed that she had overheard his mother's criticism of her, and resented it, and that her outrageous behavior was her way of striking back.

“Of course she'd strike back—the spunky little devil,” he thought, “and between us all we did give her plenty of reason for fighting us. Think of dad allowing her to become engaged to him! Well, some day, I'll make it all up to her—some day when she has learned that she can't walk all over me.” And Cupid, standing just behind him, closed one eye, and grinned cheerfully. He knew an easy mark when he saw one.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Mr. and Mrs. Boyd Hunter, Sr. had the pleasant little sitting-room to themselves. It was the evening following the unfortunate visit of Doris Marie, who had entered their home intent only on giving them pleasure on this, her last day in Paris—and who had left them feeling that she had devastated their lives much as a cyclone devastates a forest. Her visit had not been mentioned—or forgotten—by any of them; yet they were not as angry with her as they had every reason to be. They were irritated and uncomfortable because they realized that this clear sighted specimen of modern girlhood had read the situation as they knew it to be—the situation they were trying to ignore. This was their first evening without Boydie. He had declared that he could not be with them—had said so earlier in the day—and they believed he had gone to see Doris Marie safely on her way. So he had, but he kept well out of sight, and Doris Marie did not see him.

Mrs. Hunter had found a bit of sewing and kept her hands busy—eyes, too, most of the time. Boyd watched her. The picture she made took him back to the first happy weeks of their married life. He had thought to see Mary sewing, was to have before him a lovely picture in real life—and he had a foolish thought, in those days, that if she saw him hard at work trying to balance his books, she would consider him a rather good picture of the husband who meant to get for his wife all the best things of life. Mary hadn't understood.

He put his thoughts into words, quite involuntarily; "It is so hard to get another's viewpoint—at least until too late."

"Yes," replied Mary, again misunderstanding, "but I suppose that trying girl only put into words what many others are thinking of us as a family."

"I'd forgotten her for the moment," murmured Boyd; "although I don't see how I could. She certainly hasn't left me blind as to the hopelessness of my own position. I've neither past, present nor future—and she is quite right about it. There can be no hope of happiness for me—anywhere."

"I was thinking of what she said about Boydie," interrupted Mary a little irritably. She didn't want him to say anything about the hopelessness of his position, because she could not quite forgive herself for her share in the disruption of their home. "She called him mamma-boy—and—an old maid—and when he asked for a glass of milk she asked him where he kept his bottle. Oh, it was so insulting! I could kill her—"

"All modern young people talk to each other like that," said her husband. "They seem to think they are insulting when they try to be polite. Each one seems bent on pointing out all the faults in all the others, and proving that their own faults are not faults at all, but modernism—which of course, means progression. Their point of view amazes me beyond telling."

"What I'm wondering," went on Mary, who was still pursuing her own train of thought, "is whether the world—the little world Boyd and I know, regards my son as she does. Have you heard anything that—that I ought to know?"

"Yes," said Boyd, and then stopped. Ought he to tell Mary what he had heard? She had been such a wonderful mother—so self-sacrificing—so brave—and she'd brought up such a very nice boy—and she had been so happy in the thought that there could be no complaint against her on the score of motherhood—should he tell her what he had heard?

"Well?" asked Mary, noticing his hesitation, then added, quickly, "Oh, you have heard—something—that you don't like to repeat—"

"Nothing so very hard, in one way, but rather serious in another," replied her husband. "And it was as an indictment against me that I heard it. I have been severely condemned by some of the leading men here because I did not take any

part in the education of our son. I have been told that it is a duty no father has any right to ignore—and it has been added that no woman can train a son to be a really good citizen.”

“Oh—oh!” moaned Mary; “I was afraid of something like that. But what fault do they find—how can they criticize Boydie? He is the cleanest young man—without any bad habits—”

“They say his freedom from bad habits is not due to conviction on his part that such freedom is desirable, but that he has simply acquiesced in your point of view. He is negative; you are positive. You have moulded him to your liking, and he has remained negative. He is called—well, at home we’d say sissy. You heard Doris Marie; she put it into many variations—but she was saying what the business men who respect you very greatly are saying about our son. They do not blame you because they realize that you have had a very difficult position to fill, and they say you have done the very best you could. They blame me because I did not teach my son how to be a man.”

“Oh, Boyd! I’m sorry. That wasn’t fair to you. What did you say?”

“Simply that I was young—hadn’t realized—there’s no reason why we should go into that. The point is, Boyd must get away from you. He is thirty years old, and he is like a boy of twenty. But he’ll grow, if we give him the chance.”

Mary made no reply to that. She realized the truth; and she was close to tears. A good mother could bring up a son—make a good son of him—but she was too tender hearted to make him aggressive enough to be willing to overcome obstacles. An all around good citizen needed a father as well as a mother—and more especially during his formative years.

“Well,” replied Mary at last, “I’m not going to say another word against his going where he wants to go—if you approve his choice—and he can start tomorrow if that seems best.”

A tender smile played about Boyd Hunter's mouth. "It is hard on you, Mary," he said. "You'll miss him terribly. Don't think I can't understand that. But it will be best for the boy to get away—meet his own problems—and he'll have everything in his favor—except experience."

"Is it going to be very hard for you—giving him your place in the business?"

"Not under existing circumstances. I shall keep an interest—and I'll write to Stafford frequently, I suppose, after I get started. The first letter is going to be very hard. Oh, I'll have to take my punishment, all right. Really, you know, the future for me has nothing that can really compensate me for—for what is still to come. I wish I had the courage to—to get out from under—end it all—tonight—"

"Boyd, stop it!" cried Mary sharply. "You ought to be ashamed—"

"I am," interrupted Boyd, half-humorously; "that's the trouble. I've so much to be ashamed of that it overwhelms me. But don't worry; I'm too cowardly to commit suicide."

"You shan't say that, either," protested Mary. "You are not a coward. You've had a hard life to live. All the cards have been stacked against you—you simply couldn't have played yours differently."

"Why, Mary! Why Mary, you surprise me. I didn't think you'd find an excuse for me—"

"Boyd, I do think your past was given too closely to business. I do think you should have tried to make me happier in my way—but I was wrong, too. I thought too much about my way." She smiled. "Let's not talk any more about it. We both realize how silly we were."

"And we have something more important to consider. The difficulties of the present—"

"The trouble with you," interrupted Mary, "is that you've been too introspective." She was making a desperate effort to keep the conversation going on what she hoped would prove

to be safe lines. "There is no reason, so far as I can see," she continued, "why your future should be so absolutely unsatisfactory as you seem to think. I believe you can make it worth while if you only decide to make the effort."

"Easy to say—but not particularly helpful to a man of seventy with a thirty-year old body—"

"A body capable of years of work, governed by a mind of experience and a sound will," interrupted his wife. "I think you complain too much."

"That is because you do not understand. For instance, I am a home-loving man—always have been, as you know. I need a home, and have had one for less than a year out of my whole life. It seems to me that I'd rather die than go wandering about the world—the only solution Doris Marie could see for a man in my position. And she may be right about it. I may feel obliged to adopt her suggestion—simply because I haven't the courage to take my own life! Think of that alternative for a man who wants a home."

Mrs. Hunter gasped. It had come. She had been dreading it, yet she had known that sooner or later she would hear some such confession, and then it would be up to her to decide what she must do.

"I suppose," she faltered, "you think we—we might—go on—where we—left off?"

"I have sometimes thought of that," was the grave reply.

"Would you mean—come here to live—since you are not to return to New York?"

"I have thought of that, too. But I can't believe it would work." Then he paused, noting the look of relief that crept into her eyes. "You feel yourself that it would not work—our trying to build up a home life—"

"As that awful girl said, I fear criticism—you and I don't look as if we ever had belonged in the same generation. We'd be criticized, naturally, and most of the unkindly things would

be said about me. It seems as if I couldn't bear it to have people ask if I am my husband's mother. I've heard that already. I've hated it. I've tried to appear as if I took no notice—did not care—but, Boyd, I do care—awfully.”

“I have often wondered how you felt about that—and I hoped you didn't care any more than you seemed to.”

“You shrank from such criticisms, yourself—and yet they were all in your favor. If we were to go about as a man and his wife usually do, you'd be constantly ashamed of my appearance. You might try to conceal it—but I should know.”

“Sometimes I have wondered how it would be for you to go to Hicks Jarou for treatment.”

“I should not want to do that. It leads to such falsehoods—the constant fear of detection—the loss of self-respect—unless one comes right out and admits what has been done—really, Boyd, I can't seem to think it is worth while.”

“I suppose it isn't. I only thought of it as a way out.”

“It isn't the only way out. Why not divorce me? I have certainly given you sufficient reason for doing that.”

“Such a step would hurt the boy, wouldn't it?”

“He is going away into a life of his own—he would have no right to object. I think, myself, that you should have the opportunity to make a home—under proper conditions.”

“The trouble is, Mary, that having seen you again, I can no longer feel that anyone else could make me happy. You must know that there never could have been a thought of anyone else, had I not believed you to be dead.”

“Oh, Boyd, I know. I wish you hadn't admitted it. I know how you feel—I have known for weeks—and oh, my dear, I am so very sorry. If I really believed I could make you happy—do you think I'd consider myself for a minute? No, Boyd, I should try not to let any criticism of my appearance make me unhappy—if you were happy—but you would not be happy. You could not be. Yours is a young body, now; you

must find a young wife—a young woman, dear, not a mere child.”

“Tell me truly, Mary; wouldn’t that make you the least bit unhappy?”

“I’ll admit that I wish I hadn’t made such a mess of our lives. There’s never been any other man, Boyd—any thought of another man—and I am sorrier than I can tell that I left you. Had I been with you I should have favored the treatment for cancer—but I should never have allowed the rest to happen to you. But I was not with you. Had I met you again—as you were before you were rejuvenated—I am sure that I should have been glad to be your wife again. I find that our minds have much in common.”

Boyd sighed. “What a ghastly failure we have made of life,” he said. “We are told that every experience contains some blessing,—but when that experience cuts you out of everything you care for—”

“If I could accept you as naturally as Boydie seems to,” said his wife, “we’d not have quite as much difficulty; but your personal appearance—or mine—doesn’t seem to mean to him what it means to us.”

“Possibly, Mary, we are too close to our problem to be able to decide wisely. Suppose I accept Jarou’s offer—make a market for his gems—travel—see you only occasionally—try to think of this as my home—”

“And meanwhile I can go on with my work—here—”

“I have not suggested that you give up your work, unless you wanted to—even though I remained in Paris.”

“Why, Boyd! I believed that would be the first demand you would make.”

“I do not think as I did about the married woman in business. Nor do I wish to make demands.”

“Would you ever care to go in business with me—here—”

“No; that wouldn’t please me at all. I must have my own place in the business world.”

"Why not get into something here, stay in Paris—let us see each other occasionally—"

"Frequently—"

"I'd enjoy that—the opportunity to talk things over—"

"I'd tell everyone we knew exactly what happened to me—give my age—not care a damn what folks said—"

Mary shook her head, dubiously. "I'm afraid you couldn't—"

"I could try. If I couldn't manage it—why then I'd run away and leave you."

"It would be your turn to do that," smiled Mary, "and I'd try not to complain or be too unhappy about it—"

"Any danger of that?" asked Boyd quickly; "being too unhappy?"

"Well, perhaps it wouldn't come to that—you might not care to run away—we might remain good friends without being advertised as a freak couple—anyhow; we might see how things will work out—"

At that moment the evening mail was brought to their door. There was a letter for Boyd from Hicks Jarou.

"I must advise you," Boyd read, "that if you have any thought of helping me out with my synthetic gem, you should get to work at once, as I fear your period of usefulness as a traveling man will be limited. I am sorry to be obliged to inform you that similar work on patients who preceded you has been rather disappointing in that the benefits derived seem to be of a temporary nature. I am hard at work trying to remedy that—and of course you can have the work done over should it seem best and I'll not charge you for it. I believe that you are more than likely to begin aging soon, and that you will grow old rapidly if the work is not done again. You need not worry about the cancer. That is cured. Nor do I think what you have undergone will cause you to look unduly old—but without doubt you will look your age—"

“Thank God for that!” exclaimed Boyd; “Thank God! Thank God! Thank God!” the last came out like a college boy’s yell, it was so full of joy. He threw the letter into Mary’s lap, then sat where he could watch her face as she read it. And while she read it he played with the sewing in her lap, and in a moment they were clasping hands like two old people who had walked through a long life together and found only peace and contentment as they serenely faced the down-hill journey.

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